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REVIEWS & RATINGS

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CABLE WANTS YOU BACK

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Charging Into the Future

GUESSING GAMES and counting trucks. Singing along with my handheld cassette player—remember those? Stopping to stretch our legs and put gas in the car. Eagerly asking the inevitable question: "Are we there yet?" Road trips have been a family tradition for generations. But sooner than we think, many of us will be stopping to plug in, not gas up.

U.S. sales of electric vehicles (EVs) have seen explosive growth in recent years—from fewer than 2,000 in 2010 to more than 230,000 in 2018. Innovative technology and lower prices have enhanced their appeal, while the fact that these vehicles reduce harmful emissions—benefiting the environment and public health—have made them all the more attractive.

Although still a niche market, EVs are cruising their way toward becoming mainstream. That's why we've been keeping such close tabs on them, tracking the distance they can travel on a single charge as well as the rising availability of charging stations nationwide. If you're considering making the switch to charging up instead of gassing up, be sure to consult our ratings. This month we take a close look at the latest fleet of EVs and score the cars on their handling, comfort, and safety features. Plus we preview more models coming soon.

Gas-free cars may indeed be our destination. "Are we there yet?" No, not quite. But as the auto industry continues its rapid evolution into exciting new arenas like electric vehicles and autonomous technologies, you can count on CR to keep giving you trustworthy insights so that you can decide which ride will suit you and the planet best for the journey ahead.

Marta Tellado

Marta L. Tellado,
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Driving Digital Security

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Today's marketplace offers an ever-growing list of connected products—smart phones, smart TVs, smart refrigerators, even smart sneakers. Plus, we have millions of apps and other digital tools at our fingertips, and most of us are daily users of huge online platforms like Amazon and Google.

Smart technology delivers many conveniences but also raises serious questions about the safety of our personal information and the ways it's collected, shared, and exploited. Meanwhile, companies often fail to police themselves—and the federal government has not always kept pace with new technology.

HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

To tackle these problems, we've launched the CR Digital Lab, a new initiative that will expand our work on consumer privacy and digital security. Funded in part by a $6 million investment from Craig Newmark Philanthropies, the Digital Lab will build on CR's core strengths: product testing, investigative journalism, and advocacy. The aim is to develop new ways to test and report on digital products and services, from connected thermostats to cars that collect data on drivers to the websites of tech companies big and small.

"Consumer Reports has a strong track record, from ensuring the security of seatbelts in cars to keeping toxins out of food," says Newmark, founder of Craigslist and a former CR board member. "This initiative will increase transparency, giving consumers more control, more options, and stronger voices."

A previous investment by Newmark helped CR lead the development of the Digital Standard, a set of benchmarks companies can use to design digital products that respect consumer privacy. In 2018, CR applied the Digital Standard to our television testing, discovering that certain smart TVs were vulnerable to hacking. Similar work is planned or underway with routers, password managers, and other devices and services.

"The Digital Lab will reveal precisely where our rights are being undermined," says CR president Marta Tellado. "Armed with that knowledge, consumers can make choices that protect their privacy and hold digital giants to account."

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Learn more about CR's privacy work at **CR.org/dataprivacy.**

Fighting the Robocallers

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Consumers are so fed up with robocalls that most have stopped answering their phones if they can't identify the caller in advance. Robocalls aren't just annoying, either. Truecaller estimates that consumers have lost almost $10.5 billion to phone scams over the previous 12 months.

HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

In April, CR hosted a roundtable session at the U.S. Capitol on ways that Congress could curb unwanted robocalls. The next month, the Senate approved, 97 to 1, the CR-endorsed Telephone Robocall Abuse Criminal Enforcement and Deterrence (TRACED) Act. It would enable the Federal Communications Commission to crack down on scammers and require phone companies to adopt technologies that verify caller ID data before the calls reach consumers. CR has been working with the House on taking similar action, and urging President Trump to support the effort. Meanwhile, the FCC established that phone companies may preemptively block robocalls as long as customers can opt out.

Putting Privacy First
CR's Digital Lab will test new products and services to ensure that consumers' data is protected.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Go to **robocallspetition.cr.org** to join the more than 215,000 consumers urging the FCC to ensure carriers adopt effective, free anti-robocall technologies.

Pushing for Safer Furniture

WHAT'S AT STAKE

A TV, appliance, or piece of furniture tips over and kills a child in the U.S. once every two weeks, on average. Dressers are particularly deadly. Yet both the furniture industry and the federal government have been slow to take steps that could address the problem.

Two recent events, however, are likely to make these tragedies less common. One is the passage by the New York State legislature of Harper's Law, named after 3-year-old Harper Fried of Monroe, N.Y., who died from a furniture tip-over incident. (We expect Governor Andrew Cuomo to sign it into law.) In addition, following a May meeting of the ASTM Furniture Safety subcommittee—on which CR sits, along with parents, industry representatives, and other safety advocates—the group is now willing to extend a key voluntary standard to dressers as short as 27 inches.

HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

CR worked with New York legislators and the Fried family to ensure that Harper's Law would restrict sales of dressers that fail to meet baseline stability standards, while CR's New York members sent 2,600 messages of support to their state lawmakers. CR also spent months urging the industry to strengthen its voluntary standard, in particular by expanding its scope to dressers 27 inches and taller—a recommendation based on the findings of a CR tip-over investigation published in the May 2018 issue of the magazine.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Go to **CR.org/tipover** to learn more about furniture tip-overs.

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN RITTER

Our July article **"Protect Yourself From Hidden Fees"** encouraged readers to share stories of–and outrage over–unexpected charges on cable bills, airline tickets, and more. To add your voice, go to **CR.org/hiddenfees0919**.

RE: AIRLINE HIDDEN FEES. It could get worse. Imagine the fictitious following: "Ladies and gentlemen, in the unlikely event of loss of cabin pressurization, please insert your credit card in the slot next to the drop-down oxygen masks."
–Chuck Dorney, Fairborn, OH

HIDDEN FEES MAKE my blood boil. They're not really fees. The companies view them as revenue streams. I had a client years ago who explained why they do it thusly: because we can.
–Jay Montgomery, Ardsley, NY

YOUR ARTICLE on hidden fees was timely. I have had several recent experiences with them: a "historical facility" fee added to each ticket when purchasing a subscription to a regional theater; a $3 fee imposed by my credit union when I didn't access my savings account online for six months; a fee imposed on each ticket by the movie theater when ordering tickets online, added at checkout.
–Sydney Koerner, Voorhees, NJ

SO MANY PEOPLE have been abused by these absurd fees. Hotel fees have really annoyed me. I resent being charged for use of the pool and towels, even though I never got wet.
–Herbert Rothouse, Sarasota, FL

IT'S HIGH TIME that utility companies and phone dealers have full disclosures as to all the charges one could expect when getting a service. There really has to be transparency in the billing systems for just about everything customers are asked to pay for.
–Roger J. Phaneuf, El Cajon, CA

IF AMERICANS en masse refused to pay these extra fees, then corporations might have to respond. I like that CR is fighting for transparency in addressing these fees, but in the end we the consumer need to pay more attention to how we are exploited and spend our money.
–John R. Petelle, via CR.org

YOU STATE THAT the earlier you buy airline tickets "the better your chances of finding a good seat at no extra charge." Sorry, but those days are long gone. What might score a good seat is the price paid, or class of service, but even then, there is no industry standard. The airline industry is charging for "good" seats–up front, aisle, window, extra legroom, extra pitch. The only way to avoid them is to wait until online check-in, when a passenger can choose a seat free of charge. Some airlines hold back a percentage of [seats] for release 24 hours prior to departure.
–Lori Heathorn, Palo Alto, CA

EDITOR'S NOTE *As your boarding time approaches, some seats may open up because of cancellations or maybe because the airline was holding seats that they tend to charge for. So, yes, always check the seat map at check-in, but if you purchased a cheaper basic economy fare, it's very unlikely that you can upgrade to, say, a window seat free of charge by doing so.*

THE ARTICLE ABOUT avoiding unnecessary fees in car buying was especially relevant as I am planning on buying a new car. What I encountered at 3 out of 4 dealers was that the "add-ons" (vehicle identification number etching, window tinting, and more) were not optional–they were already on every car in their lot. One dealer told me that they were added because without them dealers didn't have much profit in selling cars these days!
–Ina Haugen, Claremont, CA

EDITOR'S NOTE *That's certainly frustrating! You shouldn't have to pay for extras you don't need. Don't be afraid to ask for a "fresh car" without those extras installed. Walking away is always an option, too.*

WRITE

Go to CR.org/lettertoeditor to share your comments for publication.

MORE TICK TIPS

YOUR ARTICLE "What's Wrong With This Picture?" (July 2019), about tick bite prevention, was very informative, but I'd like to offer some tips. It may take a tick some time before it bites, so rolling a lint roller over your clothing as well as any

exposed skin may help pick up ticks still crawling on you. Wear light-colored clothes. Ticks are dark, so lighter colors will show them better. If you have a tick, remove it and save it! Place the tick in a freezer bag and put it in the freezer. Chances are it will still be alive upon removal. Saving the tick will help your doctor determine what kind of tick it is and whether it may have passed a disease on to you.
–Chris Lupo, Guilderland, NY

IN TEXAS, the (also not-so-desirable) fire ant has reduced the tick population significantly. Fire ants have a painful sting but apparently don't carry diseases like the tick. Anyone in Texas would probably send some fire ants to anyone who wants them!
–Dru Edrington, Georgetown, TX

EDITOR'S NOTE *Fire ants do prey on ticks, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that tick-borne diseases are on the rise nationwide–even in Texas. Also, some people may have a potentially life-threatening allergic reaction to fire ant stings, according to the American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology. So a good tick repellent is still your best bet.*

YOU DID NOT INCLUDE tick-borne relapsing fever. I know someone who nearly died from this, having been unknowingly bitten by a tick while on vacation in Oregon. Because of its flulike symptoms, he waited about five days before going to the doctor. He spent four weeks in the intensive care unit and two more weeks in the hospital before going home to slowly recuperate.
–Kathleen Mogan, Spokane, WA

EDITOR'S NOTE *We're sorry to hear about this experience. Tick-borne relapsing fever can be very serious, but it's also rare. For more information, go to cdc.gov/relapsing-fever.*

SUNSCREEN SMARTS

AS A DERMATOLOGIST who has been involved with sunscreen testing ("Is Your Sunscreen Safe?" July 2019), I find your articles the best source of information about effectiveness and cost, and I always pass them along to patients and students.
–Arnold Ison, St. Petersburg, FL

SINCE I SPEND a lot of time outdoors, I was happy to read your feature on sunscreens. However, your ratings include no information on fragrances. I can use only products that are fragrance-free (or nearly so). I would love to find alternatives among your more highly rated sunscreens.
–Joan Campbell, Reynoldsburg, OH

EDITOR'S NOTE *Our panel of trained sensory experts evaluates every sunscreen for scent and feel. All-Access and Digital members can find scent and feel information for all the sunscreens in our ratings at* **CR.org/sunscreens0919**, *but here are three of CR's recommended sunscreens that are fragrance-free or very lightly scented: La Roche-Posay Anthelios 60 Melt-in Sunscreen Milk, Coppertone Ultra Guard Lotion SPF 70, and Trader Joe's Spray SPF 50+.*

A MOWER DEMOTION

WHY ARE CUB CADET riding lawn mowers rated so poorly this month ("A Cut Above," July 2019), when they were rated so highly last year?
–Charles Sterner, Fredericksburg, VA

EDITOR'S NOTE *Cub Cadet lawn tractors, which held a high rank in our lawn mower ratings in 2018, fell this year almost exclusively because of the brand's predicted reliability rating. Our reliability and satisfaction data, which were included in our scoring of mowers for the first time in 2019, are based on our survey, which asked CR members about their experiences with more than 30,000 walk-behind mowers and 12,000 riding mowers.*

THE ARTICLE on lawn mowers leaves out the environmental costs of Americans' obsession with perfect expanses of green around their homes. Sure, finding a good buy on a lawn mower matters, but that singular focus precludes a wider view of the damage to water supplies, insects, and birds–and the general household budget. A perfect lawn is essentially a green desert. Some lawn-care products contain nitrogen and phosphorus that pollute surface streams, rivers, and more. Consumers should minimize their lawn size to an area they actually use, and tolerate dandelions. CR's mission as a change agent and protector of consumers should be extended to make environmental consequences a constant.
–Frances Cerra Whittelsey, Huntington, NY

KEY-FOB THEFTS

"UNLOCK THE POWER of Your Car's Key Fob," in the July 2019 issue, did not mention that car thieves love these devices because the crooks can store your signals when you use the device.
–John Dickey, Smelterville, ID

EDITOR'S NOTE *That information isn't "stored." The latest trend of key-fob-related theft is done using a "relay attack" device, which is actually two devices working in tandem. One device captures the signal coming from the car key fob when a driver uses it to lock his or her vehicle. It then transmits that signal to a smaller device used to gain access to the vehicle. In many–but not all–cases, it will also allow the vehicle to be started and driven away.*

SAFE DRINKING WATER

"WHAT'S IN YOUR Bottled Water?" (Safety Update, July 2019) covers some important information on arsenic in bottled water but only briefly mentions the most effective way to avoid it: Stop buying bottled water! The vast majority of America's drinking water is safe.
–Helen Mango, Ph.D., Castleton, VT

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What We're Testing in Our Labs ...

In our 63 labs, we continually review and rate products. Here, timely picks for this month.

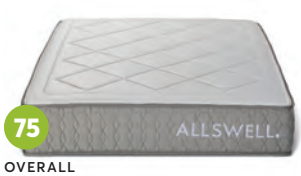
Innerspring Mattresses, $600 or Less

WE TESTED: 7 models
WE TEST FOR: Support for back and side sleepers, ranging from petite to average to large/tall; how much vibration is transmitted across a mattress; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 63
Range: 49-76

Best All Around
Denver Mattress Doctor's Choice Plush
$580

Firm & Great for Back Sleepers
Allswell Luxe Hybrid
$585



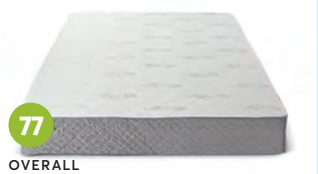
Bargain Buy
Night Therapy Euro Box Top Spring
$300

Foam Mattresses, $600 or Less

WE TESTED: 11 models
WE TEST FOR: Support for back and side sleepers, ranging from petite to average to large/tall; how much vibration is transmitted across a mattress; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 68
Range: 60-77

Great Support & Best Overall
Sleep Innovations Marley
$328



Breathable for Hot Sleepers
Tuft & Needle T&N Mattress
$595

Soft With Super Stability
Beautyrest 14" SurfaceCool Gel
$599

Ask Our Experts

My wife and I have an innerspring mattress, and when she tosses, it wakes me up. Would a foam topper help?

ILLUSTRATION: SERGE BLOCH

ADDING A FOAM TOPPER (which can cost $100 or more) may help in the short term by blunting some of the vibrations from a restless bedmate, "but it could affect your current comfort by changing the firmness and support the mattress offers," says Chris Regan, CR's lead mattress tester. If you're ready for a new innerspring mattress, look for models that state they are constructed with several inches of foam on top of the springs, which may or may not be visible. The Charles P. Rogers Powercore Estate 5000 mattress, $1,500, has foam layers and is one of the best innerspring models at minimizing bounce in our ratings. Or if you're open to a full-foam model, check out the very stable Beautyrest model (above).

For the latest ratings of these and other product categories, readers with a Digital or All-Access membership can go to CR.org.

Interior Paints

WE TESTED: 22 paints
WE TEST FOR: How well paints cover dark colors with one coat and how well they resist stains. We also note volatile organic compounds (VOCs) claims, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 67
Range: 44-83

Great at Hiding Old Paint & Zero VOCs
Behr Premium Plus Ultra (Home Depot)
$36

83 OVERALL SCORE

Super at Resisting Stains
HGTV Home by Sherwin-Williams Showcase (Lowe's)
$39

81 OVERALL SCORE

Winning Price
Kilz Complete Interior (Walmart)
$27

74 OVERALL SCORE

Air Purifiers

WE TESTED: 20 medium-sized models for 250 to 400 sq. ft.
WE TEST FOR: How well models remove dust and smoke from the air on high- and low-speed settings, noise levels, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 46
Range: 41-62

Strong on Smoke & Dust Removal
Honeywell AirGenius 5 HFD-320
$245

62 OVERALL SCORE

Easy to Operate & Clean
LG PuriCare AS401VGA1
$300

54 OVERALL SCORE

Breathe-Easy Price
Febreze FHT190W
$90

51 OVERALL SCORE

Free Antivirus Software, 2019

WE TESTED: 12 products
WE TEST FOR: How well products protect against exploits from websites, how effective they are at scanning on-demand for malware, ease of use, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 64
Range: 24-80

Best Protection (for Windows)
Bitdefender Antivirus Free Edition

Bitdefender

80 OVERALL SCORE

Clear Instructions & Help (for Windows)
Avast Free Antivirus, 2019

avast

79 OVERALL SCORE

Best Protection (for Mac)
AVG Antivirus for Mac

AVG

64 OVERALL SCORE

Portable Generators

WE TESTED: 12 models
WE TEST FOR: How much wattage models deliver, how well they handle power surges, how smoothly and consistently they deliver power, runtime, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 66
Range: 53-84

Top Power Delivery & Longest Runtime Overall
Generac XT8000EFI
$1,380

84 OVERALL SCORE

Handy Fuel Shutoff Feature
Ryobi RY907000FI
$1,000

74 OVERALL SCORE

Good Bang for Your Buck but No Electric Start
Generac GP5500 5939
$730

67 OVERALL SCORE

Note: *We rate different products according to different testing protocols. As a result, Overall Scores of one product category are not comparable with another.*

COMING NEXT MONTH Microwaves & More

I often see foods labeled 'no artificial sweeteners,' even though stevia is in the ingredients list. What gives?

Stevia is hundreds of times sweeter than sugar and has no calories. It comes from a plant, so some consider it a "natural," rather than an artificial, sweetener. (Aspartame and sucralose, by contrast, are wholly cooked up in a lab.) However, to make stevia, its sweet-tasting compounds—called steviol glycosides—are extracted from the plant leaves and purified. (The Food and Drug Administration doesn't allow the leaves themselves to be used in food.) This can be done with water or alcohol, but sometimes the extracts are modified with enzymes. In addition, the glycosides can also be made using yeast that has been genetically engineered.

"Not only does the Food and Drug Administration not regulate the term 'no artificial sweeteners,' but the term 'natural' also lacks any regulatory definition, so manufacturers can use the claim as they wish," says Charlotte Vallaeys, M.S., senior policy analyst for food and nutrition at CR. "The starting material for stevia extracts may be natural, but these ingredients are highly processed." Also know that evidence that stevia aids in weight loss or lowering blood sugar levels is very limited.

LEARN

We have more than 140 in-house experts who research, test, and compare. Submit your questions at CR.org/askourexperts ... and watch for the answers.

I opened a 529 college account for my son. What do I need to know before withdrawing from it?

Good move: Contributing money to a 529 account is the best way to save for college because of the tax benefits you get. But withdrawing the money isn't so straightforward, says Donna Rosato, a senior money editor at CR. If you're not careful and spend the funds on the wrong type of education expenses, you could get hit with a 10 percent penalty and owe taxes on gains in the account.

Though you can use 529 money for a wide range of college costs, including tuition, fees, books, and computers, there are some education-related expenses that don't qualify. Health insurance offered by the school, for example, is not covered. So check with your plan administrator before you start withdrawing.

Also know that you must spend the money on expenses incurred in the same calendar year, not academic year. But you may not want to spend the money all at once, Rosato says. If you think you'll need to take federal loans later, spread out 529 withdrawals. The amount of federal loans you can take out is capped each year, so if you need to borrow more than those limits, you may have to turn to less consumer-friendly private loans to cover the gap.

I've heard conflicting advice about preserving laptop battery life. What should I actually be doing?

There is indeed a lot of misinformation floating around about how to keep your laptop battery working longer. "That's because battery technology has improved rapidly, and a lot of old advice stays in circulation even though it doesn't apply anymore to newer technology," says Rich Fisco, head of electronics testing at CR.

Gone are the days when it was important to let batteries drain completely, then charge them all the way back up to 100 percent. "That's now unnecessary with newer lithium-ion batteries," which power practically every laptop and smartphone, Fisco says.

For long-term battery health today, the best tactic is to avoid charging it all the way to 100 percent or letting it run down to zero, says Antonette Asedillo, who oversees CR's computer testing. "Ideally, you want to keep your battery charged between 20 and 80 percent."

Turning off your laptop every day isn't necessary, either. "It's fine to leave your computer in standby mode for a few days at a time," Asedillo says. However, to keep it running smoothly, a full reboot every few days is still a good idea in order to receive updates and clear your RAM.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY SERGE BLOCH

CR Insights

Le Creuset, 5.5 quarts $340

83 OVERALL SCORE

Lodge, 6 quarts $60

80 OVERALL SCORE

In the Know

A Dutch Oven Cook-Off

DUTCH OVENS, also known as cocottes, are typically a thick-walled cast-iron pot with a dome-shaped lid used for braised meats, stews, sauces, and bread baking.

For many chefs, this versatile pot has become synonymous with the Le Creuset brand, which has been making them since 1925. Our tests show that its Signature Dutch Oven (above, left) offers excellent cooking performance for browning meats and can transition into the oven (up to 550° F, the highest of the pots we tested). For its hefty price, Le Creuset also offers a lifetime warranty and a wide variety of appealing enamel colors.

But a few other brands of Dutch ovens on the market—**particularly Lodge—now offer similar-looking pots that promise comparable performance for less money.** So our test engineers put eight Dutch ovens through their paces, boiling water, browning meat, caramelizing scallops, simmering tomato sauce, and baking bread. Staffers weighed in on the moistness and tenderness of braised briskets, and the taste and texture of bread.

Though no model could knock the Signature Le Creuset from the top spot in our ratings, the Lodge Dutch Oven came the closest in overall performance, with strong loop handles and a larger 6-quart capacity. It even turned out better bread. But it doesn't simmer sauce or brown meat quite as well as the Le Creuset, and the limited lifetime warranty isn't quite as generous. For less than a fifth of the price, though, the Lodge is a solid choice.

HOW DO OTHER DUTCH OVENS STACK UP?

These three pots also did well in our tests.

GOOD ALL-AROUND, BUT ONLY FAIR AT BROWNING

Ayesha Curry Covered Dutch Oven $70

76 OVERALL SCORE

BARGAIN FOR BREAD MAKING, BUT 1-YR. WARRANTY

Vremi Dutch Oven $45

73 OVERALL SCORE

GREAT AT BROWNING, BUT PRICEY

Staub Cocotte $325

63 OVERALL SCORE

PHOTOS: JOHN WALSH/CONSUMER REPORTS. ILLUSTRATIONS: T.M. DETWILER

For more ratings, All-Access and Digital members can go to CR.org/cookware0919.

How to Clean Practically Anything™

Your Grill

IT'S SMART TO clean your grill after each use, but as outdoor cooking season draws to a close in some states, it's also important to do a final deep clean before rolling it into storage. Tackling this chore now will keep your grill in tip-top shape for next spring, and help keep away rodents and other pests that can be attracted to leftover food bits and grease.

3 Embers GAS7480BS $650

72 OVERALL SCORE

A Quicker Clean
Some grills, such as this 3 Embers, have a slide-out grease tray to make cleanup even easier. Simply remove the tray and wash with soapy water.

PHOTOS, BOTTOM FROM LEFT: MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY; CONSUMER REPORTS. OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP: JOHN WALSH/CONSUMER REPORTS

GRATES
Put your grill on full heat for 10 to 15 minutes with the lid closed. Turn it off and wait until the grates are still warm but cool enough to touch. It's easier to clean gunk off warm grates–simply scrub both sides with your grill brush, water, and dish soap.

FIREBOX
Turn off the propane, then take out the flavorizer bars and wipe or wash them off. If you see crud in the small slits of the burner tubes, our testers say a toothpick is the perfect tool to de-gunk them. Then scrape the bottom of the firebox and use soapy water to wipe down the inside.

PROPANE TANK
Before storing the tank, it's smart to check the gas hose for leaks. Turn on the gas, then spritz soapy water on the hose and connection to the tank. Any large bubbles indicate a leak and mean the hose should be replaced. Otherwise, turn it off and disconnect the tank for storage.

COVER
If you're leaving a grill outside for the cold season, make sure its cover is vented so that condensation doesn't get trapped.

CR Time Traveler BREAKFAST

1921 Charles P. Strite patents the first pop-up toaster—a design he developed after becoming fed up with burnt toast in his work cafeteria.

1937 Shirley Temple says that Quaker Puffed Wheat is "my cereal," while CR reports that it costs almost three times as much as some others.

1945 Under a microscope, we examine six breakfast cocoas (a then-popular morning drink) to see how much cacao shell they contain; too much means a gritty beverage.

1949 We test 21 toasters, including the Toast-O-Later J, an appliance that "walks" pieces of toast through the machine one after the other. Though inventive, our testers find it to be slow and top-heavy.

POOR — EXCELLENT | RECOMMENDED | CR BEST BUY

BEST FOR $50 OR LESS

BIKE HELMETS

These helmets are low-priced but don't skimp on safety. All received an Excellent rating in our impact-absorption test.

BEST OVERALL

Giro Register MIPS $50
(pictured above)

85 OVERALL SCORE

EASY TO ADJUST

Bell Draft $40

82 OVERALL SCORE

EXTRA-BUDGET-FRIENDLY

Schwinn Intercept Adult $22

74 OVERALL SCORE

SCORES FOR ALL 35 ADULT HELMETS TESTED
Median: 70
Range: 22-88

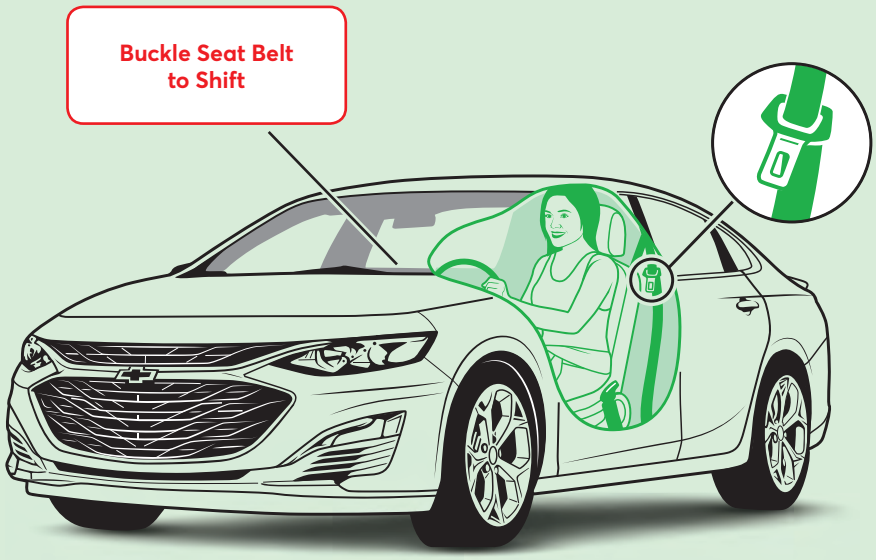
Cool Product Feature of the Month

New Safety Tech for Teens

CAR CRASHES ARE the No. 1 killer of U.S. teens. In fact, the fatal crash rate per mile driven for 16- to 19-year-olds is nearly three times the rate for drivers age 20 and older, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. Though speeding and alcohol play a role, statistics show that seat-belt use is lowest among teen drivers. When restraint use was known, 2016 data shows that 47 percent of teen drivers killed were unrestrained at the time of their crashes.

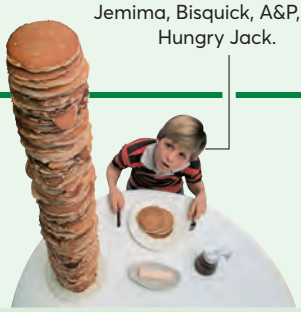
Several automakers already offer models with specific features that let parents set restrictions or provide a means to monitor a teen driver's behavior, such as capping maximum speeds and limiting audio volume levels.

But the latest development from Chevrolet takes a new approach: The manufacturer has introduced an industry-first "Buckle to Drive" feature on the 2020 Colorado, Traverse, and Malibu (below). When "Teen Driver Mode" is activated, if the driver steps on the brake and tries to shift into gear without buckling her seat belt, the car will not shift out of Park for 20 seconds. The driver will also hear an audible alert, and a warning will appear on the instrument panel that reads: "Buckle seat belt to shift." This way, teens get a compelling reminder to clip in.



1959 Ads market Tang as a substitute for morning orange juice. But CR says that Tang's label "reads like a chemical smorgasbord." Some of our tasters say it is "unpleasantly synthetic."

1968 We test nine USDA-inspected brands of breakfast sausage, only to find that 30 percent of the sausages failed our tests for filth and bacteria.



1979 CR experts cook and taste about 1,500 pancakes in search of the perfect mix. Five stack up: Jiffy, Aunt Jemima, Bisquick, A&P, and Hungry Jack.

1981 We test 57 breakfast cereals. Cheerios, Grape-Nuts, and All-Bran are among the 11 judged best for nutritional quality.

2019 Of the 80 toaster models in our ratings, the Breville, below, is our top-rated. Turn to page 36 for more useful and high-scoring countertop appliances—starting at $30!

Breville Bit More BTA720XL toaster $80

92 OVERALL SCORE

For more toaster ratings, All-Access and Digital members can go to CR.org/toasters0919.

Product Spotlight

Snap-Together Patio Tiles

THESE OUTDOOR FLOORING products market themselves as an inexpensive, easy DIY way to upgrade your cement patio or porch into a chic-looking deck. The products we tested are indeed simple to install, says lead decking tester Joseph Pacella. These interlocking 1-square-foot tiles (sold in sets or as single tiles) have grooved edges, so all a consumer needs to do is line up the corresponding tabs, then press down until the tabs click into place.

The options we tested were pretty budget-friendly. To cover a small area, say, 144 square feet of patio, using the Ikea tiles (shown above), for example, you'll spend a total of about $320. Though, if you want real wood tiles, such as the Archatrak or Bare Decor tiles listed below, that same square footage will cost you substantially more, between $980 and $1,650.

In our labs, we also evaluate how these materials hold up against typical wear from foot traffic, stains, and dents, as well as how slippery they are—all tests that we also put traditional decking materials through. We repeat some of these tests at one-year increments for three years, as well as track each tile model's resistance to color change and weathering over time.

So far, after one year, Ikea's inexpensive plastic deck tiles have done the best overall in our initial tests, though the teak tiles from Bare Decor offered good slip resistance.

RESISTANCE TO ...	**Archatrak SwiftDeck IPE Wood Tile** $11.45 per sq. ft.	**Bare Decor EZ-Floor in Solid Teak** $8 per sq. ft.	**Ikea Runnen in Dark Gray** $2.29 per sq. ft.
WEAR	⌄	⌄	⌄
SLIPPING	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃
STAINING	⌄	⌄	⌃⌃
SURFACE DAMAGE	⌄	⌄	⌃⌃

CR Money-Saver

Don't Delay on Buying Your Thanksgiving Plane Tickets

IF YOU'RE PLANNING to travel over the Thanksgiving holiday, you might save yourself some cash by purchasing your ticket soon, advise our money editors.

You'll get the lowest holiday airfares if you book your travel before early September. And even later September prices tend to be better than October or November prices. In the past, the analysts at Google Flights have seen that prices rise in the month of October, then spike a week before your November departure date.

If you're having trouble finding inexpensive fares, also keep in mind that **your departure flight date may not be as important in determining the ticket price as when you plan to return.** If your travel dates are flexible, planning to return after the post-Thanksgiving weekend ends (say, the Tuesday or Wednesday) could help you score a cheaper ticket.

Still Confused By ...

Your Fridge's Water Filter

HOW DO I KNOW WHEN IT'S TIME TO REPLACE MY FILTER?
Many manufacturers' filters last about six months, but depending on your usage and your local water, you may need to change it more frequently than that. Some models have an indicator that will let you know when the filter needs to be changed. Other signs that your current filter has kicked: The water begins to trickle out more slowly or the taste may change, becoming similar to the taste of water straight from your unfiltered tap.

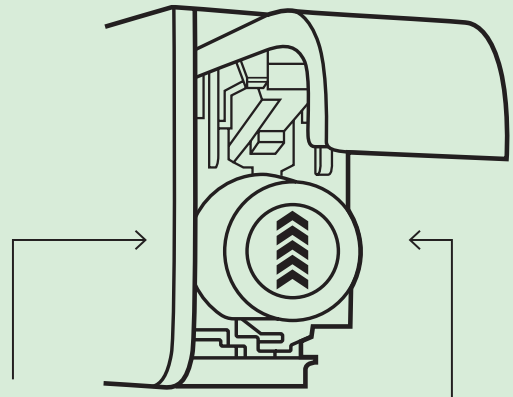
HOW MUCH DO REPLACEMENT FILTERS COST?
Filters can be surprisingly pricey. A six-month replacement filter for a $1,163 Frigidaire side-by-side, for example, costs $40.95. Assuming the expected life span of your fridge is 12 years, you'd be paying an extra 85 percent of the fridge's purchase price for the filters—almost doubling the cost of the appliance. And we've seen some filters that cost even more, around $50. So before buying a new fridge, it's smart to find out the filter's cost and factor it in.

IS IT OKAY TO USE CHEAPER FILTERS BOUGHT ONLINE?
We don't advise it. After investigating, CR found that most aftermarket filters we looked at on amazon.com weren't certified to recognized quality and performance or safety standards. (Last fall, Amazon told CR that it requires filters to meet a minimum standard, but the company was still working to secure compliance from all of its suppliers.) The only aftermarket brand we found with proper, verifiable certifications for its filters is Culligan, which sells its filters for about 40 percent less than those from refrigerator manufacturers.

If you shop online, make sure that any filter you buy is at least certified by a recognized test lab to comply with the voluntary standard NSF/ANSI 42, which is NSF International's standard that addresses the aesthetic qualities of water, as well as material safety. (To learn about other water filter certifications that address various other contaminants you might be concerned about, go to **CR.org/filters0919.**)

But be aware that cheaper, seemingly name-brand filters from third-party sellers online can be fakes. "If at all possible, you should purchase filters directly from industry-verified sources, such as those listed on refrigerator manufacturer's websites," says James Dickerson, CR's chief scientific officer. According to a recent industry-sponsored study, counterfeit filters can do more harm than good—actually contaminating the water that passes through them.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I JUST DON'T REPLACE THE FILTER?
Most public drinking water is relatively safe without being filtered, and many refrigerators from brands including GE, LG, and Whirlpool (which makes the KitchenAid model with a $50 replacement filter, below) will dispense water just fine without a filter in place, says CR's lead fridge tester Joseph Pacella. So if you don't care about filtering your water for, say, improving the taste, then you don't need to spend money on replacement filters. "But fridges made by Frigidaire and Electrolux require the filter to be installed for the water dispenser and icemaker to work," Pacella says.



EveryDrop Ice & Water Refrigerator Filter EDR1RXD1
$50

KitchenAid KRSC503ESS $2,100

71 OVERALL SCORE

SEPTEMBER IS THE BEST TIME TO BUY ...

LAWN MOWERS | **GENERATORS** | **CHAIN SAWS**

For more info, go to CR.org/buy0919.

RECALLS

TO STAY INFORMED ABOUT RECALLS FOR YOUR VEHICLES, READERS WITH MEMBERSHIP CAN USE OUR FREE CAR RECALL TRACKER AT **CR.ORG/MORE**.

FORD F-150

FORD AUTOMOBILES

Ford is recalling about 107,850 2013 F-150 vehicles with a 6-speed automatic transmission and 5.0-liter and 6.2-liter gasoline engines that had the powertrain control module software reprogrammed as part of recall 19S07. The software used for recall 19S07 did not have the updates necessary to prevent a potential unintended downshift into first gear or to ensure illumination of the malfunction indicator light.

Depending on vehicle speed, an abrupt downshift without warning could result in loss of vehicle control, increasing the risk of a crash. Affected vehicles were built at the Dearborn Assembly Plant May 7, 2012, to Oct. 27, 2013, and at the Kansas City Assembly Plant April 18, 2012, to Nov. 18, 2013. Vehicles that have not had 19S07 performed are not affected by the new recall and will receive updated software under the existing 19S07 program.
What to do: Dealers will reprogram the powertrain control module with the appropriate software calibration. The Ford reference number for this recall is 19S19.

MACBOOK PRO LAPTOPS

Apple is recalling about 432,000 15-inch MacBook Pro laptop computers because the batteries can overheat, posing a fire hazard. They were sold at Apple stores and electronics stores, and online at apple.com from September 2015 through February 2017 starting at about $2,000.
What to do: Stop using the laptop and call Apple at 800-275-2273 or go to apple.com to determine whether your computer is part of the recall and to schedule a free repair.

APPLE WALL PLUG ADAPTERS

Apple is recalling about 814,000 three-prong AC wall plug adapters because they can break and expose the metal portion of the adapter, posing an electric shock risk. The adapters were sold at Apple stores and other home electronics stores, and online at apple.com from January 2003 through January 2015 for about $30.
What to do: Stop using the wall plug adapter and call Apple at 800-275-2273 or go to apple.com for details and to get a free replacement.

WOODEN TOY VEHICLES FROM TARGET

Target is recalling about 495,000 Bullseye's Playground wooden toy vehicles because the wheels on them can detach, posing a choking hazard to children. The toys were sold at Target stores and online at target.com from October 2018 through November 2018 for about $1 for individual vehicles and for about $8 for the 8-pack.
What to do: Take the toys away from children immediately and return them to any Target for a refund. Call Target at 800-440-0680 or go to target.com for details.

AMAZON SPACE HEATERS

Amazon is recalling about 355,235 AmazonBasics 1,500-watt ceramic space heaters because they can overheat, posing fire and burn hazards. The heaters were sold at amazon.com from October 2017 through March 2019 for $25 to $35.
What to do: Stop using the heater. Amazon will directly contact all customers who bought the heaters with instructions on how to receive a full refund. Or call Amazon at 888-280-4331 for details.

ION AUDIO PORTABLE SPEAKERS

Ion Audio is recalling about 41,000 portable speakers with brand names Sport Express, Cornerstone, Cornerstone Glow, and Keystone because hydrogen gas can leak from the battery when it is charging and the speaker can burst, posing an explosion hazard. Sport Express speakers were sold at Best Buy from June 2018 through May 2019 for about $70. Cornerstone, Cornerstone Glow, and Keystone speakers were sold at electronics stores and online from March 2016 through March 2019. Cornerstone and Cornerstone Glow models sold for about $100; Keystone, for about $200.
What to do: Stop using the recalled portable speakers and contact Ion Audio at 833-682-0371 for details and to get a refund in the form of an Ion Audio gift card.

HONDA ROVs

Honda is recalling about 82,000 model years 2016 through 2019 Honda Pioneer 1000 side-by-side vehicles because the throttle pedal can stick in the open position, posing crash and injury hazards. The ROVs were sold at authorized Honda Powersports dealers nationwide from August 2015 through March 2019 for $14,000 to $22,000.
What to do: Stop using the ROV and contact an authorized Honda Powersports dealer to schedule an appointment for a free inspection and repair. Call American Honda at 866-784-1870 or go to powersports.honda.com for details.

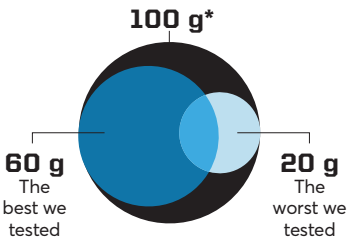
AMERICAN APPAREL SLEEP SACKS

American Apparel is recalling about 10,600 children's "sleep sacks" (a type of sleepwear) because they don't meet the flammability standard for children's sleepwear, posing a risk of burn injuries to children. The sleep sacks were sold online at americanapparel.com from January 2018 through January 2019 for $15 to $20.
What to do: Take the recalled sleep sacks away from children, stop using them, and contact American Apparel at 833-222-7760 for details and either a full refund or a replacement product.

Product Update

The latest ratings from our labs

How much dirt do uprights and canisters pick up from carpets?



*Amount of dirt, in grams, we apply to a carpet.

Cleanup Crew

Our thorough tests uncover the best upright, canister, and stick vacuums for carpet or hardwood floors, and for special needs, such as pet hair and allergies.

Shark DuoClean Powered Lift-Away Speed NV800 $300

75 OVERALL SCORE

Dyson Ball Animal 2
$500

73 OVERALL SCORE

INSIDE **CR'S LABS**

Our testers (Sue Booth shown here) cover 16 miles of carpet and hard flooring to identify the vacuums that pick up messes—from talc and sand to pet hair—best.

Source: Consumer Reports test labs.

WHETHER YOU'RE WHISKING up a mess of spilled coffee grounds on the kitchen floor or giving your living room carpet a workout after a week of golden-retriever roughhousing, you want the job to be done well—and that means no crumb or hair ball left behind.

Choosing the right type of vacuum for the task at hand is the key to your success. Large, or full-sized, vacuums include canisters and uprights, the most powerful type. Each of these has its advantages. If you live in a single-story home with lots of carpets, an upright is a good choice. But if you live in a multilevel home, a canister lets you rest the weight of the machine on a landing while you clean the stairs with the hose.

Small vacuums include stick, handheld, and robotic models. (We're in the midst of testing more robotic vacs, so those models are not discussed here.) Stick and handheld vacuums are lightweight and convenient for picking up smaller messes. They're not intended for serious cleaning—though stick vacuums as a category are becoming more powerful.

"The main difference between uprights and canisters vs. sticks and handhelds is in their ability to deep-clean carpet," says Frank Rizzi, one of our vacuum test engineers. "Lighter vacuums don't have the strong suction and brush-roll combination of uprights and canisters."

The Rigors of Our Testing

To determine how well vacuums perform, we conduct different tests for different types. Here are the details:

Carpet cleaning. Inside a climate-controlled chamber, our testers weigh each empty canister or upright and each carpet section before embedding talc and sand into the pile. After vacuuming, machine and carpet are weighed again to see how much the vacuum sucked up. For stick models, a mix of dry rice, sand, and Cheerios is scattered on the surface of the carpet and vacuumed; the stick is weighed before and after the test. We also apply pet hair to the carpets, weighing the hair before and after vacuuming.

Bare-floor cleaning. Using sand for uprights and canisters, and the same rice-sand-Cheerios mix for stick vacuums, we measure the pickup for each model. We test to see how well stick vacs clean edges and corners. Our testers broadcast sand into a corner along a simulated baseboard. Then they measure the distance of the remaining sand to the edge after one full pass.

Emissions. The best vacuums keep dirt well-contained inside a bag or dustbin to keep the air clean—an important consideration for allergy sufferers. During these evaluations, our testers fill each vacuum with a precise measure of fine wood flour and run it in a sealed chamber, measuring the amount of flour released back into the room down

WILL YOUR VACUUM LAST?

We asked CR members about the problems they experienced with more than 51,000 nonrobotic vacuums in our 2018 survey. Here's a look at how 18 brands compare across the three most widely sold vacuum types.

PREDICTED RELIABILITY RATINGS

BRAND	UPRIGHT	CANISTER	STICK
BISSELL	⌄	⌄	–
BLACK+DECKER	⌄⌄		⌃
DIRT DEVIL	⌄⌄	–	⌃
DYSON	–	–	⌄⌄
ELECTROLUX	⌄	–	⌄⌄
EUREKA	⌄⌄	–	⌄
FULLER BRUSH	⌄		
HOOVER	⌄	⌄	–
KENMORE	–	–	
KIRBY	–		
MAYTAG	⌄		
MIELE	–	⌃⌃	–
ORECK	⌄		–
RAINBOW		⌃⌃	
RICCAR	⌄		
SEBO	⌃⌃		
SHARK	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃
SIMPLICITY	⌄		

PHOTO, PREVIOUS PAGE: JOHN WALSH/CONSUMER REPORTS

⌄⌄ ⌄ – ⌃ ⌃⌃
WORSE — BETTER

ICONS BY ELIAS STEIN

to 0.1 micrometer. Then testers use the same vacuum to clean carpet scattered with more wood flour and measure the air again for particles released after the vacuum's brush has agitated the carpet.

We also test handling, or how easy each model is to use; noise; and tool airflow, which is the strength of the machine's hose suction and how well the suction holds up as the vac fills with dust.

To calculate predicted reliability, we survey our members about the products they own, then use the data to make projections about how new models from a given brand will hold up over time. Predicted reliability ratings are based on estimated problem rates by the end of the fifth year of ownership for vacuums not covered by a service contract.

As you can see, a lot of work goes into determining which vacuums clean the best–to save you work once you get your new machine home.

WATCH

To see how CR puts vacuums to the test, watch a clip from our TV show, "Consumer 101," at CR.org/vactests0919. For more episodes, check your local NBC listings, or watch them on demand.

PICKUP ARTISTS

The three models below are all-around winners that wowed at every cleaning task. Keep in mind that uprights and canisters undergo our same tough tests, so you can compare their Overall Scores. But tests on stick models are tailored to their lighter use, so their scores are comparable only within their category. On the following pages, you'll find more top picks specifically for carpets and hardwood floors, as well as choices for pet owners and allergy sufferers.

MIELE COMPLETE C3 MARIN
$1,100

84

This Miele is one of the only full-sized vacuums to earn an overall rating of Excellent. It beats most other canisters in most of CR's tests. And the rating gets a boost from Miele canisters' marks for reliability and owner satisfaction. It costs almost twice as much as its brandmate, the Miele Complete C3 Alize, $650 (see page 22). But it has a powered brush roll that the Alize doesn't include.

KENMORE ELITE PET FRIENDLY 31150
$350

77

This Kenmore is one of our top-performing uprights, with scores of Very Good or Excellent in most tests, including best-in-class performance on bare floors and emissions, and impressive carpet and pet-hair cleaning. It's not perfect, however. It's noisier than average and at 21 pounds is heavy for an upright, which contributes to a lower rating for handling.

BISSELL AIR RAM 1984
$200

87

Excellent overall, this quiet machine earned the highest scores in our bare-floor, carpet, and pet-hair tests. It contains dirt exceptionally well and got a Very Good grade in our edge-cleaning test (clearing sand along a simulated baseboard). The dustbin is easy to empty and replace, with a lever that helps push the debris from the bin. Average battery run time is 47 minutes.

BEST FOR CARPET

Your wall-to-wall and area rugs will be tamed by these models. They ate up our testers' mix of ground-in grit with ease. If you're vacuuming stairs, consider the canister or, for convenience, the stick.

BAGLESS UPRIGHT

✔ **DYSON BALL ANIMAL 2**
$500

73

It's among the very best in our tests at cleaning embedded dirt from carpets, and it excels on bare floors and at picking up pet hair. Suction is strong, and particle emissions are low. But it's noisier than average, the on/off switch location is inconvenient, and the lack of low-suction settings makes cleaning delicates, such as draperies, difficult.

BAGGED CANISTER

✔ **KENMORE ELITE PET FRIENDLY ULTRAPLUSH 81714**
$400

76

Uprights are usually more effective than canister models at cleaning carpets, but this Kenmore stood up to sand and talc like a champ. It also impresses on bare floors and with pet hair (as you'd expect from a model called Pet Friendly). Suction power is also a plus. Negatives? Handling is just average, and it's fairly noisy.

CORDED STICK

$ **DIRT DEVIL POWER STICK SD12530**
$80

85

This corded stick vacuum delivers best-in-class carpet-cleaning performance, dispatching our testers' messy mix of sand, dry rice, and Cheerios with ease. It's also effective at cleaning bare floors, reaching into edges, and picking up pet hair. Plus, it's quiet and converts to a hand vac. But it's not a great choice for allergy sufferers.

BEST FOR HARDWOOD FLOORS

Canister vacs are generally better-suited for bare floors than uprights or sticks, but all three of these models aced our bare-floors test, picking up debris neatly, without scattering it across the surface.

BAGLESS UPRIGHT

✔ **SHARK NAVIGATOR POWERED LIFT-AWAY NV586** (Target)
$300

77

This standout Shark, sold through Target, is one of the highest-rated midpriced uprights. It scores Excellent for bare floors and Very Good for carpet, and has better handling and stronger suction than most of its competitors. And it features a brush on/off switch, which minimizes the dispersal of dirt and protects the finish on hardwood floors.

BAGGED CANISTER

✔ **MIELE COMPLETE C3 ALIZE**
$650

77

It weighs significantly less than most full-sized canisters, but this highly rated bagged model performs very well overall. Its Excellent grades for cleaning bare floors and for suction are on a par with the best in our tests. It posts an Excellent score for noise, rare for a full-sized vacuum. This model does not have a powered brush roll.

CORDLESS STICK

✔ **KENMORE ELITE COMPLETE 10441**
$350

77

Top ratings in our bare-floor, edge-cleaning, and pet-hair tests make this model a winner. It comes with two brush rolls, one for carpet (bristles) and one for bare floors (soft roller). It has a charging wall mount with accessory storage and an LED dirt sensor, and it converts to a handheld vacuum. Average battery run time is 19 minutes.

BEST HANDHELD VACUUMS FOR $50 OR LESS

It's a pain to haul out a full-sized vacuum to clean up snack crumbs between your sofa cushions or dog hair from the back seat of your car. Those are perfect tasks for a handheld vacuum—and these budget-friendly vacs can tackle them without breaking the bank.

Because handheld vacs aren't intended for deep cleaning, we adjust the tasks in our tests to match their typical uses—such as cleaning up dry messes quickly and reaching into tight spots well. Many of the newly tested cordless models have updated, longer-lasting lithium-ion batteries, and the run times for the models in our tests range from 9 to 30 minutes.

Many models come with useful accessories. The Black+Decker and Eureka at right come with crevice tools; the Bissell has a pet-hair tool.

POOR — EXCELLENT | ✔ RECOMMENDED | $ CR BEST BUY

BEST FOR PET OWNERS

Picking up all the long, feathery Maine Coon cat fur our testers stomp into the test carpets is no easy feat, but these top performers do the job so well you'll be purring.

BAGGED UPRIGHT

MIELE
DYNAMIC U1 CAT & DOG
$550

76

You'd expect a vacuum named Cat & Dog to wow on pet hair, and this upright doesn't disappoint. It delivers superb pet-hair pickup, aces carpet and bare-floor tests, and serves up impressive suction. It's also fairly quiet and has a brush on/off switch to protect bare floors. But at 22 pounds, it's among the heaviest models; that lowers its handling score.

BAGLESS CANISTER

MIELE
BLIZZARD CX1 CAT & DOG
$900

77

This highly rated bagless canister weighs just 15 pounds but performs well overall. Its Excellent grades for picking up pet hair and cleaning bare floors are among the highest in the class. Top performance does come at a high price. But Miele canisters' reputation for reliability and owner satisfaction indicate that many feel it's worth it.

CORDLESS STICK

DIRT DEVIL REACH MAX PLUS BD22510PC
$130

78

Rated Very Good overall, this cordless model excels at picking up pet hair and aced our carpet and bare-floor tests. However, it struggled with edges and does not do a good job at preventing small particles from being released into the air when vacuuming—so it's not the best option for allergy sufferers. Average battery run time is 19 minutes.

BEST FOR ALLERGY SUFFERERS

Great marks in our emissions tests mean these models keep dirt inside the machine and out of the air. Your best bet is a bagged model with a HEPA filter.

BAGGED UPRIGHT

KENMORE PET FRIENDLY 31140
$200

74

This bagged Kenmore is one of the top budget uprights, offering outstanding value. It excels at capturing all the dust it picks up, important if you have allergies or other respiratory problems. And it gets Very Good or Excellent marks for cleaning and delivers the strongest suction in its class. Any caveats? It's pretty noisy and, at 21 pounds, heavy.

BAGGED CANISTER

KENMORE ELITE PET FRIENDLY CROSSOVER 21814
$500

75

This Kenmore is a top performer among canisters. In addition to its Excellent emissions grades, it earns some of the category's highest scores for cleaning carpet and for suction power and is very good at pet hair. It has a HEPA filter. At 26 pounds, it's among the heaviest in our tests, contributing to its Fair score for handling.

CORDLESS STICK

SHARK ION F80 CORD-FREE MULTIFLEX IF281
$450

85

Like most stick models, this quiet, cordless Shark is bagless. Still, it did extremely well in CR's emissions tests, as well as at pet-hair and bare-floor cleanup. A flexible "elbow" makes it easier to clean under furniture. And to tackle trouble spots, it shifts into high-power mode for 60 seconds. Average battery run time is 24 minutes.

BLACK+DECKER DUSTBUSTER CHV1410L
$50

78

BISSELL PET HAIR ERASER 33A1
$35

71

EUREKA EASYCLEAN 71B
$50

71

All-Access and Digital members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/vacs0919.

Cable Wants You Back.

After losing customers to a host of streaming services and facing competition from new companies, traditional cable says it's cheaper and better. We help you decide which option is best for your entertainment needs—and budget.

by James K. Willcox

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ALVARO DOMINGUEZ

Every year, more Americans decide to fire their traditional pay-TV provider, whether that's a cable service or a satellite TV company. In 2018, the traditional U.S. pay-TV providers lost more than 3 million subscribers, according to industry analysts Leichtman Research Group.

One option for so-called cord cutters is to sign up for Sling TV, DirecTV Now, or one of the other cable-replacement streaming services that have sprung up in recent years to supply live broadcast and cable channels over the internet. Remember, to do this you still need decent broadband service, and that's likely to come from the same company that supplied your TV service in the first place.

If you're thinking of going the cord-cutter route, the decision is more complex than it was just a year ago. CR's advice then was to make a list of your favorite channels, find a cable-replacement service that provided them, and then simply sit back and count your savings each month.

That process still works, but the math has changed significantly.

Almost every cable-replacement streaming service has hiked prices recently, and channel lineups seem to change every few months. Prices are also rising for on-demand streaming video services, such as Netflix, and major media companies are getting ready to launch their own services, adding consumer choice–but also confusion.

Meanwhile, cable companies are trying to hang on to subscribers by promoting limited packages at discounted prices. This new marketplace competition is a boon to consumers who no longer have to tolerate the old "take it or leave it" days of cable TV. Now we have lots of choices when it comes to programming and pricing.

However, putting together your household's strategy for TV entertainment is trickier now. Whether you decide to stick with cable, opt to cut the cord and sign up with a cable-replacement service, or decide to just stream videos from a service such as Hulu or Netflix, you might not get everything you want from a single service–or even two.

"It's pretty clear the growing number of options has made it much more confusing for consumers," says Dan Rayburn, principal analyst at media research firm Frost & Sullivan. "More people will find themselves having to pay for and manage content across multiple services rather than getting everything from a single provider."

The juggling act is underway in many households, with so-called "stackers"–people who subscribe to multiple streaming services–on the rise.

More than 70 percent of U.S. households that use streaming services subscribe to more than one, according to research firm Ampere Analysis. Just under a quarter subscribe to three services, and nearly 20 percent sign on to four or more services.

That's confusing. It can be expensive, too. In many of these homes, the monthly cost for streaming is approaching or exceeding a traditional cable bill. If you subscribe to a cable-replacement service, a few premium channels, such as HBO and Starz, plus Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and maybe a Major League Baseball streaming package, you might not be saving money by cord-cutting.

In this report, we'll help you decide whether a cable TV package or a cable-replacement streaming service makes the most sense for you–or whether you'd be better off with neither of these options. Quite a few people get by with just a streaming service, such as Hulu or Netflix, especially if they can get good TV reception using an antenna.

We'll also give you a rundown on streaming services you might not know about, including free options, and help you choose a streaming media device to access video over the web.

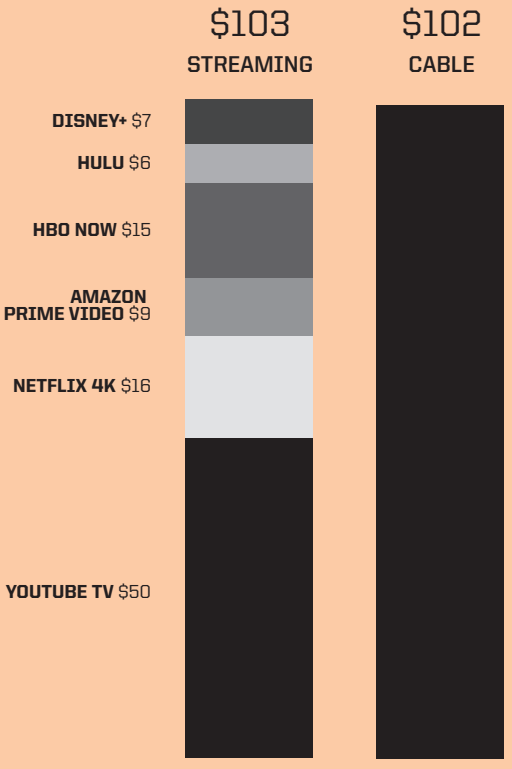
The old world of TV entertainment was easy for people to understand, but the lack of choice was frustrating. The new world is complicated but ultimately has much more to offer.

What It Costs to Watch TV

The legions of Americans abandoning cable TV aren't necessarily going on a content diet. Many are "stacking" a variety of online streaming video services to get an à la carte combo of channels, shows, and movies. The chart below shows just how many services you can get for the same cost as an average cable TV package. Each service scratches a different itch: YouTube TV has 70-plus live channels; Amazon Prime Video, HBO Now, Hulu, and Netflix offer original shows and movies. Cut out a few services and you can save plenty of money relative to a typical cable bill. But the math is getting less friendly to streaming. The charts at right show how several major online video services have raised their prices in the past few years. One big advantage relative to cable, though: no tacked-on fees.

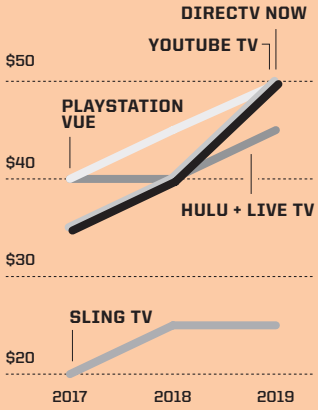
STREAMING VS. CABLE TV

(Cost of cable is national average; prices don't include internet service. Disney+ is coming in November 2019.)



RISING COST OF CABLE-REPLACEMENT SERVICES

Monthly cost



RISING COST OF NETFLIX

Monthly cost

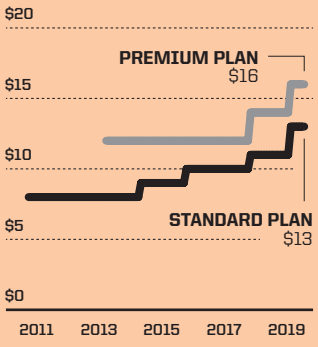


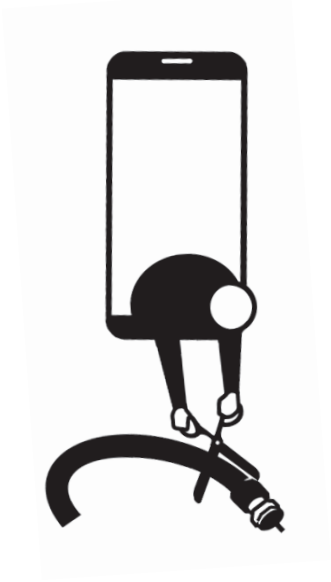
ILLUSTRATION: JASON SCHNEIDER

Cable vs. Streaming Live TV

If you like flipping through broadcast and cable channels such as ABC, CNN, and HGTV, you have two main options. You can stick with cable or satellite TV, which have been around for decades. Or you can switch to one of several cable-replacement services that stream live TV channels over the web. Either way, you'll be able to watch broadcast and cable networks, catching the news or the Thursday night sitcoms as they air.

The pros and cons of these options are laid out on the next two pages. (For details on using an antenna to watch broadcast TV, see page 32.)

By contrast, Netflix and other on-demand streaming services are not channels per se, or even collections of channels. Rather, they're better thought of as libraries of TV shows and movies that you watch whenever you want. For options, see pages 30 to 33.



THE CASE FOR CABLE

People are so used to hating their cable companies that it can be hard to recall what made cable so impressive to begin with: dozens, even hundreds, of channels—all available around the clock. And most of the time, cable TV just works. You don't suffer delays or buffering because of bandwidth limitations or a balky WiFi network, the way you might with a streaming service. Here's why you might want to keep, or maybe reconsider, a traditional pay-TV package.

Convenient Billing, Familiar Layouts

If you get TV and internet access from the same company, you'll get one bill for both services. And you're already familiar with how the program guide works and with channels you've been flipping through since, well, forever. That's not always how it works with streaming services. (See "Help! How Do I Change the Channel?" on page 34.)

Cheaper, Skinnier Plans

Cable companies are coming up with less expensive, stripped-down plans to compete with cable-replacement streaming services. For example, Cox has a plan that costs around $35 per month (see details on page 30), and Charter has a $45-per-month Spectrum Select plan that serves up about 125 channels. These low prices are in line with many streaming TV plans, which typically start at $40 or $50 per month.

Better Cable Boxes

Bulky, old-fashioned set-top boxes are largely a thing of the past, at least for the major TV providers. Instead, many companies now offer next-generation set-top boxes with modern interfaces and support for newer TV features, such as 4K video with high dynamic range (HDR). Some now offer apps that let you access online streaming services, such as Netflix and YouTube. More cable boxes also include voice capability and compatibility with Amazon Alexa or Google Assistant, so you can use voice commands to change channels or search for shows and movies.

And ... the Case *Against*

Consumer Reports members typically give low scores to their cable companies in our annual surveys, dinging them for value and customer service.

One problem is cost. The average annual bill for TV service was more than $1,200 in 2018, according to Kagan, a unit of S&P Global Market Intelligence. That's over $100 per month—just for TV—and many people find that bills are higher than what they anticipated when they signed up.

"Over the last several years, cable companies have begun to impose new fees for services that were previously included in the base rate for service," says Jonathan Schwantes, senior policy counsel at Consumer Reports. The tacked-on charges, which include "broadcast TV" and "regional sports" fees, keep rising. These days, the rate you see in an advertisement may only be about three-quarters of the total bill that comes in the mail, once fees and taxes are added in.

THE CASE FOR STREAMING ALTERNATIVES

Generations of cable TV viewers have complained about paying for channels they didn't want. And to make things worse, most consumers didn't have a choice among providers in their neighborhoods. Today's cable-replacement streaming services are addressing both problems. The half-dozen or so services

ILLUSTRATIONS: JASON SCHNEIDER

on the market all offer more than one tier of service, going from as few as 33 channels up to 140-plus channels. That boosts your odds of finding a mix of content that feels right for the price. And if you change your mind, you can quickly switch to another tier or even a different company—no appointment with the cable guy or satellite-dish installer needed.

Here's why you might want to switch to a cable-replacement service.

Lower Prices

Even with recent price hikes, most of the cable-replacement plans cost less than half as much as the average pay-TV bill, according to market research firm eMarketer—admittedly for far less programming. You can get a bunch of channels for as little as $15 per month. More robust services that offer 60 or 70 channels, including local broadcasts and cable channels such as CNN and HGTV, are typically priced around $45 or $50 monthly. Compared with basic cable, that's cheap.

No Box Rental

Most cable companies require you to rent a set-top box for a monthly fee of $10 or so, which can add up to more than $100 annually; receivers with DVRs can cost even more to rent. By contrast, you access a streaming service using an app on a smart TV or a streaming device that plugs into your set, such as a Roku Streaming Stick or an Apple TV. You can buy a streaming player outright for as little as $30, and there are no recurring hardware charges.

No Confusing Fees

The aggravating, hard-to-understand charges you find on cable TV bills don't show up on invoices from cable-replacement streaming services. You may choose to pay extra each month for more DVR storage or for premium channels, but those are optional charges for added services.

And ... the Case *Against*

It's true that cable-replacement services deliver broadcast and cable channels over the internet—but there are caveats.

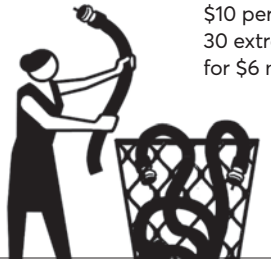
Live local broadcasts aren't available from every service in every TV market—and entire channels are missing from certain services. As just one example, Sling TV doesn't have CBS anywhere in the country. You need to check carefully to make sure a particular plan delivers the channels you want.

The savings vary, too. Cable-replacement services are still typically less expensive than cable TV, but the gap is eroding. Most of the companies raised monthly rates by $5 or $10 earlier this year.

And services may limit how many users can access the service at one time. For instance, the base plans from DirecTV Now and Hulu + Live TV let just two devices play content simultaneously, though you can often add users for $5 or so per month.

LIVE TV STREAMING SERVICES THAT WANT YOU TO DUMP CABLE

DirecTV Now
$50 to $70 per Month for Featured Plans
Like the satellite service but without the dish. You get more than 45 live TV channels in the basic plan, plus on-demand titles and even HBO.



FuboTV
$55 per Month
A cable-style streaming service for sports fans. The base plan has about 100 channels with live sports, shows, and movies, plus a cloud DVR, You can add more DVR storage for $10 per month and 30 extra channels for $6 more.

Hulu + Live TV
$45 per Month
A good option for those who like both local channels and cable networks, because you also get everything in Hulu's $6-per-month streaming library. You get more than 60 live and on-demand channels, including TV shows, movies, and Hulu originals. Includes a cloud DVR; you can pay more to get more storage or additional content.

Sling TV
$25 to $40 per Month
An option for cord cutters on a budget. Sling TV offers two $25 plans—Sling Orange and Sling Blue—plus a $40 option with about 50 channels that combines both. (Orange has ESPN but no locals; Blue has NBC and Fox but no ESPN.) You can pay for additional channel packs; a cloud DVR costs $5 per month.

Sony PlayStation Vue
$50 to $85 per Month
The streaming service that gets closest to a cable TV package. You get between 50 and about 100 live TV and on-demand channels, including local broadcasts, regional sports networks, and cable channels. The priciest plan includes HBO and Showtime. A cloud DVR with 28-day storage is included.

YouTube TV
$50 per Month
A good choice for those looking to save money without giving up sports or major cable channels. YouTube TV offers 70-plus broadcast and cable channels, plus major sports networks such as CBS Sports, ESPN, and Fox Sports. A cloud DVR with unlimited storage for up to nine months is included.

How Live TV Package Costs Compare

SKINNY

CABLE	STREAMING
$35-Plus	**$15**
Cox TV Starter Advertised at $25 per month; add $10 broadcast TV fee and $3 mini-box rental, plus taxes. 75-plus channels: local broadcasts from all the major networks in most markets, a smattering of cable channels. No DVR available.	**AT&T WatchTV** A low-cost plan that's free to some AT&T mobile subscribers. It has 35-plus cable networks but no local broadcasts. You also get thousands of on-demand shows and movies. It's limited to one user at a time, and it lacks a DVR but has a 72-hour look-back feature for shows that have aired.

BASIC

CABLE	STREAMING
$80-Plus	**$50**
Comcast: Digital Starter Advertised at $60 per month; add up to $10 for broadcast TV and $8.25 for a regional sports fee, plus taxes. 140-plus channels: broadcast TV plus cable channels. Price guaranteed for only one year, and service is limited to one TV.	**YouTube TV** 70-plus channels, including all the major broadcast networks in many markets. Cloud DVR with unlimited storage for up to nine months is included, and three people can use the service at a time. Pay $5 to $9 per month extra for AMC, Showtime, or Starz. (HBO is not available.)

PREMIUM

CABLE	STREAMING
$110-Plus	**$85**
Spectrum Gold Advertised at $85; add $7.50 for a cable box/DVR, $5 for DVR service, $12 for broadcast TV, plus taxes. 200-plus channels, including the major broadcast networks and many cable channels, including HBO, Showtime, Starz, and The Movie Channel.	**Sony PlayStation Vue Ultra** About 100 local and cable channels, including HBO and Showtime. A sports pack, with NBC and Fox sports channels, and NFL Red Zone, costs an extra $10 per month. A cloud DVR stores shows for up to 28 days.

Streaming on Demand

In the beginning, there was Netflix. Since then, on-demand streaming options have expanded into the dozens. Some, such as Amazon Prime Video and Hulu, compete with Netflix by providing lots of movies, reruns of TV episodes, and their own original content—including some of the most highly regarded shows being made now. But the streaming world is still changing … a lot. New streaming services continue to launch, including three coming soon from major tech and entertainment companies. Beyond the big guys, a number of streaming services cater to niche interests, such as documentaries and classic films.

Here's the ever-changing world of streaming, as it exists in 2019.

THE BIG THREE

Netflix

Netflix is still the chest-beating gorilla of the streaming jungle. It has the largest subscription base, and it offers unlimited streaming of TV shows, movies, comedy specials, and original programming. Netflix's prices have been climbing, most recently by 13 to 18 percent for its three plans.

WHAT'S NEW: The basic standard-def option now costs $9 per month, while the most popular Standard plan, which gets you HD quality, costs $13. The Premium plan, which lets you stream to more screens simultaneously and includes 4K content, costs $16 per month. The increasing price isn't the only reason some of the shine is coming off Netflix; the platform will be losing a lot of content owned by Disney after that company launches its own streaming service.

NOTABLE NETFLIX ORIGINALS: *"Stranger Things," "The Umbrella Academy," "Chef's Table."*

Amazon Prime Video

Many people think of Amazon Prime Video as free—and it is, sort of, if you're already paying the company's $119 annual fee to get two-day shipping on purchases. This service has loads of movies and television shows, and a growing roster of great original programming. Prime also lets you add premium channels via its Amazon Channels service.

WHAT'S NEW: You don't save any money by subscribing to CBS All Access, HBO, or Showtime this way, but it adds convenience. Your payments just go through your Amazon account—no separate sign-in or billing setup needed. And you can access all the content through Amazon Prime instead of jumping out and then launching HBO, say, to catch up on "Big Little Lies."

NOTABLE AMAZON PRIME ORIGINALS: *"The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel," "Jack Ryan," "Good Omens."*

Hulu

Hulu zigged when other services zagged earlier this year, cutting the monthly price of its basic ad-based service to $6 while competitors were raising rates. But the basic service is just one of Hulu's streaming options. The company's cable-style Hulu + Live TV service (see page 29) rose in price slightly, and the commercial-free version of classic Hulu remained unchanged at $12 per month.

WHAT'S NEW: Hulu, now controlled by Disney, is a great way to watch current TV series without paying for cable or a cable-replacement package. You get access to new episodes from most broadcast networks, plus a handful of cable shows the day after they air.

NOTABLE HULU ORIGINALS: *"The Handmaid's Tale," "Castle Rock," "The Looming Tower."*

NEW CHALLENGERS

Apple TV+

Details of Apple's new subscription TV service were still a bit sketchy this summer—we didn't know the price or launch date as of early July—but it was clear that Apple TV+ would be home to an expansive, and expensive-to-produce, slate of original content. That includes a reboot of Steven Spielberg's 1980s series "Amazing Stories"; a drama about a morning talk show, starring Reese Witherspoon and Jennifer Aniston; "Little Voice," about an up-and-coming singer, from director J.J. Abrams and songwriter Sara Bareilles; and a thriller from director M. Night Shyamalan. Oprah Winfrey will create a series of documentaries. Apple is earmarking $2 billion for video content, according to Rich Greenfield, analyst at equity research and strategy firm BTIG.

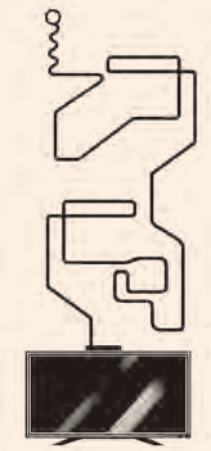
In addition to bingeing on all that, you will be able to subscribe to premium channels, such as HBO and Showtime, and watch them from the Apple TV app—similar to the way Amazon Prime Video Channels works.

In the spring, an Apple TV app rolled out to select 2018 and 2019 Samsung smart TVs, and will soon be available on other smart TVs and streaming players as well. This means that, for the first time, folks won't need an Apple TV device to get content purchased or rented from iTunes on their TV.

Disney+

When it launches Nov. 12, Disney will open the gates to a huge library of blockbuster content for the relatively low price of $7 per month or $70 if you pay for a whole year. The entertainment goes far beyond Disney-branded material.

BACK TO THE FUTURE: WHY ANTENNAS ARE HOT AGAIN



TV antennas are enjoying a resurgence in popularity. As of early 2019, 28 percent of U.S. households with a broadband connection were using an antenna to get TV broadcasts, according to research firm Parks Associates.

"Digital antennas are experiencing a resurgence as consumers consider over-the-air TV and [online] video services as alternatives to traditional pay TV," says Brett Sappington, senior director of research at Parks.

Buy an antenna and you might be able to skip a pay-TV service and just sign up for a streaming service. And they don't cost much—it's a one-time expense of about $20 to $80. You may get dozens of channels, and picture quality might be better than with cable. But reception can vary based on where you live.

Next year some stations will start moving to a new over-the-air standard called "Next-Gen Broadcast TV." It's based on the internet protocol (IP) used by computers, so web content can be sent alongside traditional TV broadcasts.

You may also get 4K video and high dynamic range (HDR) programming, which yields brighter, more colorful images.

Another benefit is that signals can also be received on mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets.

Today's TVs won't be able to receive these broadcasts, but don't worry: The switch will take years to complete. Even then, older TVs will be able to add an external tuner to play the new signals. And your current antenna will still work fine with these new signals.

ILLUSTRATION (ANTENNA): JASON SCHNEIDER

The company owns Lucasfilm (all the "Star Wars" movies), Marvel Studios ("Avengers"), Pixar ("Toy Story," "Coco"), and 20th Century Fox ("The Sound of Music," "The Princess Bride," and TV shows including "The Simpsons"). A lot of that material will be available at launch. Some of it is currently available on Netflix but will appear only on Disney+ starting next year.

Disney+ says it has plans for 10 original films and 25 original series, including several Avengers spinoffs and the "The Mandalorian," a big-budget Jon Favreau-directed series set in the "Star Wars" universe.

HBO Max

AT&T's WarnerMedia division says it will launch HBO Max in spring 2020. The company hasn't announced pricing, but speculation in the media is that the streaming service is likely to cost $16 or $17 per month, just above what the company charges for HBO Now.

This could be a compelling option for many because the service will include the premium HBO service, a slate of new original programs, and titles from the TV and film library of Warner Bros. There will also be content from AT&T's other properties, including Cartoon Network, CNN, DC Entertainment, TBS, The CW, TNT, and Turner Classic Movies.

For example, the service will have the exclusive streaming rights to every episode of "Friends" and "The Fresh Prince of Bel Air"; original movies from producer Greg Berlanti and Reese Witherspoon; and original series, such as "Love Life," starring Anna Kendrick, and "The Flight Attendant," starring Kaley Cuoco.

WHAT YOU CAN GET FREE

Ad-supported free streaming services are among the fastest-growing segments of the streaming world.

Many public library card holders can access **Hoopla** and **Kanopy** to watch popular and indie movies.

Amazon's **IMDb TV** focuses on older movies and TV shows, plus IMDb programs such as celebrity interviews and documentaries.

Pluto TV, owned by Viacom, gets some programming from that company's networks (BET, Comedy Central, MTV, Nickelodeon) along with modern movies and older classics.

People with a Roku streaming player or Roku TV can watch the **Roku Channel,** which has a nice assortment of free movies and TV shows. And **Sony Crackle**—being renamed Crackle Plus—has a library of older TV shows, popular older movies, and even some new original shows and movies.

SnagFilms streams movies, TV shows, and documentaries outside the mainstream. **Tubi** boasts a library of more than 15,000 movies and TV shows, including selections from the libraries of Lionsgate, MGM, and Paramount Pictures, plus Starz Digital.

Vudu, best known as a pay-per-view service, has a rotating selection of free older movies and TV shows, and it's getting some original content later this year.

And you might think of **YouTube** as the home of user-created content, but the site also provides some free movies and documentaries in its Free to Watch section.

IF YOU LOVE …

British TV

Those who enjoy British TV fare have a choice between two great services: **Acorn TV,** which costs $6 per month or $60 annually, and **BritBox,** priced at $7 per month or $70 annually.

One big difference between the two is that Acorn also has programs from other countries, including Australia, Canada, Ireland, and New Zealand. Exclusive programs on Acorn include "Martin Clunes' Islands of America" and "Jack Irish," which stars Guy Pearce.

With BritBox, you get many popular BBC shows, including "EastEnders," "Coronation Street," and "Antiques Roadshow," plus older classic episodes of "Dr. Who" (the first seven Doctors) and two seasons of "Fawlty Towers."

IF YOU LOVE …

Independent Film

Rising from the ashes of the now-defunct FilmStruck service, **The Criterion Channel,** $11 per month or $100 annually, targets filmophiles with constantly refreshed selections of Hollywood, international, art house, and independent movies, plus access to Criterion's entire streaming library of important classic and contemporary films.

Mubi, $11 per month, offers 30 curated classic or highly acclaimed films each month. **Shudder,** $6 per month or $57 annually, caters to horror fans, while **Spuul,** $5 per month or $50 annually, offers access to a huge library of Bollywood films.

Help! How Do I Change the Channel?

IF YOU CUT the cord on traditional cable and switch to a cable-replacement streaming service, you might feel somewhat bewildered. You'll still have your favorite channels—but they could be tricky to find.

It's not like cable TV, where you just hit the Power button and start flipping through channels.

"In many cases, you'll need to launch an app—or two—to even get to the streaming service," says Matt Ferretti, who tests TVs and streaming players at Consumer Reports.

Along the way to your show, you may find yourself threading through unfamiliar layers of menus and icons and switching between a couple of remote controls.

Here's why. First, modern smart TVs have an onscreen interface—the main home screen for the TV—with their own set of apps. If your smart TV doesn't have an app for your cable-replacement service, you're going to need a separate streaming player, such as an Apple TV or a Roku. That player will have a second menu system plus its own remote control. (Check out our ratings of streaming media players, on the facing page.)

And once you open the streaming service's app, it has its own interface, too.

Learning the Ropes

"There's a learning curve for many people who replace cable with a streaming service," Ferretti says. "But it's probably less daunting for those who already use a popular streaming service such as Netflix. Lots of cable-replacement services mimic that type of layout."

The screen may display rows of tiles representing programs organized in any number of ways. Depending on the service, or which view you choose, you might see content separated by genres (sports vs. news or sitcoms), movies separated from TV series, or live TV broadcasts set off from on-demand content.

If you prefer, you might be able to switch to a list of shows that looks like a cable-TV-style program guide. However, the companies that design these systems don't think you'll want to.

"A majority of our users have been traditional pay-TV subscribers," says Vikash Sharma, assistant vice president for video products at AT&T. "We wanted to welcome

WHY YOU MAY WANT TO START TALKING TO YOUR TV

One way to find the show you're looking for is to just ask your TV. Digital voice assistants, such as Amazon Alexa and Google Assistant, are showing up on many smart TVs and streaming media players.

You can use voice commands to search for movies, TV shows, actors, and apps, rather than pecking out a search with your TV remote.

Certain systems also let you change channels or pause a show. You may even be able to voice-control lights and thermostats through the TV.

But every system operates a bit differently, and not all apps support voice. Some TVs support multiple voice assistants that handle separate tasks, which can get confusing. Thankfully, more sets now route voice commands to the right assistant automatically.

ILLUSTRATION (TV VIEWER): JASON SCHNEIDER

them into the DirecTV Now experience with the familiarity of the traditional guide, while updating several elements of the user experience to take advantage of a modern streaming environment."

For instance, on cable TV we're used to networks being arranged numerically by channel numbers. There's no reason to do that with information transmitted across the internet, so some streaming services arrange channels alphabetically.

Certain streaming apps let you customize the interface, so you can create a menu of favorite shows, or automatically get recommendations for movies and shows you might like.

It's impossible to spell out just what each person will encounter, because so many combinations of TVs, streaming devices, and streaming services are available. If you make the switch, you should expect some trial and error.

As an example, let's say three households sign up for YouTube TV, a cable-style service. One family might find the YouTube TV app preloaded on its TV. Another might access the service on an Apple TV after downloading the YouTube TV app from the App Store. The third might connect a Roku device, which already has the YouTube TV app.

Once they open the streaming service, all three households will see the same interface. But each would control it using a different remote.

Our suggestion: Don't let the quirks deter you. At Consumer Reports, we get exposed to lots of systems and talk to lots of consumers. Typically, we find that people get used to whichever system they have. Just be patient and the confusion will abate.

Ratings › **Streaming Media Devices** These are an easy, inexpensive way to give any TV internet capability. Even many smart-TV owners still prefer to use a stand-alone streaming player.

Recommended	Rank	Brand & Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results: Picture quality	Features	Everyday use	Connectivity	First-time setup	Built-in voice search
		HD STREAMING MEDIA DEVICES								
✓	1	**Google** Chromecast (3rd generation)	76	$35	⇈	⌃	⌃	⌄	⌃	
✓	2	**Amazon** Fire TV Stick With Alexa Voice Remote	74	$40	⇈	⇈	⌃	I	⌃	●
✓	3	**Roku** Streaming Stick (2017)	72	$40	⇈	⇈	⌃	I	⌄	●
$	4	**Roku** Express (2017)	69	$30	⇈	⇈	⌃	I	⌄	
		4K STREAMING MEDIA DEVICES								
✓	1	**Roku** Ultra (2018)	83	$80	⇈	⇈	⌃	⌃	I	●
✓	2	**Amazon** Fire TV Cube	82	$120	⇈	⇈	⌃	I	⇈	●
$	3	**Amazon** Fire TV Stick 4K	81	$50	⇈	⇈	⌃	I	⇈	●
✓	4	**Google** Chromecast Ultra	80	$70	⇈	⇈	⌃	I	⌃	
✓	5	**Apple** TV 4K (32GB)	77	$180	⇈	⇈	⌃	I	I	●
$	6	**Roku** Streaming Stick+	77	$50	⇈	⇈	⌃	I	⌄	●
$	7	**Roku** Premiere+ (2018)	76	$50	⇈	⇈	⌃	I	I	●
$	8	**Roku** Premiere (2018)	72	$40	⇈	⇈	⌃	I	⌄	

HOW WE TEST: **Picture quality** includes image clarity, color accuracy, and contrast of the streaming video at the native output resolution. The **Features** score reflects the presence or absence of features. The **Everyday use** score indicates how easy it is to use the device. **Connectivity** relates to the number and types of connections included. **First-time setup** reflects how easy it is to set up the product. **Overall Score** is based on the performance of the product in all our tests.

Supercharged 4K Player

ROKU ULTRA
$80

83

Roku's flagship streaming player offers the best performance of any Roku model, plus the wide assortment of channels that make the Roku platform a top pick for most users. This model is essentially the same as the earlier Roku Ultra model it replaced, except it now comes with JBL earbuds.

Best Stick-Style Model

AMAZON FIRE TV STICK 4K $50

81

Amazon's stick-style player is among the least expensive 4K models you can buy, but it doesn't skimp on features. It has Alexa, Amazon's voice-powered digital assistant, so you can control it from Alexa-enabled devices such as the Echo. And the remote can control power and volume on many TVs.

Budget Model for the Smartphone-Savvy

GOOGLE CHROMECAST $35

76

If you don't need 4K, this disc-shaped 1080p model may fit the bill. Like all Chromecast players, it has no remote; instead, you use your smartphone or tablet to select the programs you want to watch, then send—or "cast," in Google's parlance—content to the TV. We found this newer model to be speedier than its predecessor.

Counter Intuitive

THESE FIVE SMALL APPLIANCES CAN HELP YOU PREP AND COOK A RANGE OF TASTY AND HEALTHY MEALS BY PROVIDING MORE CONVENIENCES THAN EVER BEFORE. WE STEER YOU TO TOP PICKS AND SHARE TIPS ON HOW TO USE THEM TO THEIR FULLEST.

by Kimberly Janeway and Perry Santanachote ..... photographs by Ted + Chelsea Cavanaugh

THE KITCHEN COUNTERTOP sure is getting crowded. If you're a coffee drinker, you've got your brewer. Most people keep a toaster on standby. And because all good things come in threes, there's usually one more small appliance claiming counter space.

"The third slot is sometimes taken by another fundamental, like a food processor or blender," says Joe Derochowski, a home analyst at the market research firm NPD Group. "Sometimes it's a trendier item, like a multi-cooker or air fryer."

Every week, it seems, new versions of these gadgets hit the market with promises to make your culinary life easier, or at least more interesting. And broadly speaking, home cooks are eating it up. In the U.S., consumers spent more than $700 million on multi-cookers and $500 million on air fryers in the past year, according to NPD.

Which ones actually deserve a spot on your kitchen counter—and won't end up collecting dust in a cabinet? We put the newcomers through their paces. We'll let you know how they did in our tests, plus tell you the cooking tasks you can tackle to determine which appliance—or appliances—make sense for the way you like to cook. Bon appétit!

(A)

BLACK+DECKER 8-SLICE DIGITAL EXTRA WIDE TOASTER OVEN TO3290XSD $100

72

(B)

CROCK-POT 6-QT. COOK & CARRY MANUAL SLOW COOKER SCCPVL600-S $30

68

(C)

NUWAVE 6-QT. AIR FRYER 37001 $130

75

(D)

CUISINART ELITE FOOD PROCESSOR 2.0 FP-12BCN $200

67

(E)

BREVILLE FAST SLOW PRO 6-QT. MULTI-COOKER BPR700BSS $250

81

Multi-Cooker

Pressure-Cooked Chickpeas
This healthy, savory stew takes only 20 minutes in a multi-cooker.

FOOD STYLING: JAMIE KIMM. PROP STYLING: ELYSE REMENOWSKY. ICONS: ELIAS STEIN

This versatile wunderkind can take on tasks that usually require multiple appliances—pressure-cooking, steaming, sautéing, and slow-cooking. One-pot meals or stews that would typically take half a day to cook can be done in half the time with the press of a button.

WHAT IT CAN DO:
ROAST / STEW / BAKE / SLOW-COOK / SAUTÉ / PRESSURE-COOK / AIR-FRY / REHEAT / SOUS VIDE

WHAT TO COOK:
STEW / STEAMED VEGETABLES / SOUP / YOGURT / RISOTTO / RIBS / OATMEAL / CHEESECAKE / CHILI / EGGS

PROS

Because it does so many cooking duties, this is the ultimate all-in-one appliance.

Models with a pressure-cook mode prepare meats and beans in far less time than conventional cooking methods.

It's hands-off cooking; no need to stand by a stove to prepare your meal.

It won't heat up the entire kitchen like your oven can.

Tons of recipes are available, from the book included in the packaging to various food websites and multi-cooker cookbooks.

CONS

You'll need a fair amount of counter and storage space. Of the models we tested, the average size was 12"Hx15"Wx14"D.

You have to factor in an extra 10 to 15 minutes for the appliance to come to pressure, and then again to release it.

There's a learning curve to adjust to the different cooking methods.

Multi-cookers have opaque lids that lock during pressure-cooking, so you can't check on food without stopping the appliance and waiting for the pressure to release.

Usually the pots are round, so bigger cuts of meat may not fit.

TIPS FROM OUR EXPERTS

› **Don't overfill the pot** with liquid, especially when pressure-cooking. Excess liquid can spray out of the vent valve.

› **Grains, beans, and other dried foods** expand as they cook, so don't go beyond the pot's halfway point.

› **The pressure cooker** uses moist heat, so brown or sear meat and vegetables before pressure-cooking to add depth of flavor.

› **In order to build pressure,** the appliance needs a minimum amount of liquid in the pot. Check your manual for the correct amount. But don't overdo it, because the sealed lid prevents liquids from evaporating like they do in conventional cooking.

› **Milk and other creamy dairy products** can scald or curdle under pressure. So add them after the pressure-cooking process is done.

› **The lid's silicone seal can retain food odors.** If you think that might bother you, consider getting a second ring just for sweets. Or banish lingering smells with a 3-minute vinegar soak before washing.

› **All of the models we tested have dishwasher-safe inserts**—but they take up a huge amount of room in the lower rack. Some models also have dishwasher-safe lids; see our multi-cooker ratings, on page 45.

BREVILLE FAST SLOW PRO BPR700BSS
$250

81

Our highest scorer, this Breville is tops in pressure-cooking, rice-cooking, and steaming, and it's the only one we've tested that earns an Excellent rating for slow-cooking. The beef in our stew turned out perfectly tender in 5 hours; chili took 7. A big plus for veggie lovers: This cooker doesn't use pressure for steaming, so vegetables come out al dente, not mushy.

NINJA FOODI OP302
$230

79

Ninja revolutionized the multi-cooker by adding a crisping lid that can broil food after pressure-cooking for a crackling finish. Our testers tried it with a whole chicken and the skin crisped up nicely. You can also use the lid to bake cookies and air-fry food. It earns an Excellent rating for pressure-cooking, making rice, and sautéing, and scores a Very Good rating for slow-cooking and steaming. It's bigger than most models, and the crisping lid can't be removed.

INSTANT POT DUO60 7-IN-1
$100

75

This 6-quart model is rated Excellent for pressure-cooking and Very Good for making rice. It's not as good when it comes to steaming, though, earning a Fair rating for producing broccoli and baby carrots that were on the too-soft side. It's middle-of-the-road when it comes to slow-cooking, worth noting if you're hoping to ditch a stand-alone slow cooker.

Toaster Oven

Don't mistake this appliance for a simple toaster. These mini-ovens do everything their bigger siblings can. Newer models even have features such as air-frying, convection cooking, and slow-cooking.

WHAT IT CAN DO:
REHEAT / BAKE / BROIL / TOAST / AIR-FRY

WHAT TO COOK:
PIZZA / BACON / BURGERS / FISH / GRILLED CHEESE / VEGGIES / COOKIES

Succulent Shrimp
A plate of garlic shrimp can be prepared in under 5 minutes.

PROS

Handy if you're cooking a small portion or your full-sized oven is maxed out.

Heats up faster than a regular oven.

Browns foods nicely and gives pizza a crispy crust (unlike in a microwave).

CONS

Could be a space hogger. And you'll need one with a depth of at least 12 inches if you want to make pizza.

May require its own electrical outlet. The Breville Smart Oven, at right, comes with that recommendation.

BREVILLE BOV650XL

$180

78

Earning a Very Good rating in our reheating and baking tests, this 1,800-watt Breville turns out just-right sugar cookies and corn muffins. It also makes a perfect slice of toast in 3 minutes, though it fits only four slices.

BLACK+DECKER 8-SLICE DIGITAL EXTRA WIDE TO3290XSD

$100

72

This 1,500-watt Black+Decker has a convection feature, which speeds up cooking and browns food. It's impressive at baking and reheating, evenly reheating a serving of lasagna in 15 minutes.

BREVILLE SMART OVEN AIR CONVECTION BOV900BSSUSC

$400

71

This 1,800-watt Breville offers a temperature range of 80° F to 480° F, eight rack positions, and features such as convection, air-fry, and dehydrate. It's impressive at baking and reheating, and is among the models rated easiest to use.

TIPS FROM OUR EXPERTS

› **Allow sufficient space** between racks for the heat to circulate evenly.

› **Use a light-colored pan** when roasting vegetables to prevent their natural sugars from burning. That's because a dark pan accelerates the transfer of heat and can brown food too fast.

› **Use a pan with low sides** when using the convection feature to give the hot air ample room to circulate.

› **When using multiple racks,** switch pans to a different rack and rotate halfway through cooking so everything cooks uniformly.

› **When possible, position food** near the center of a rack to produce the best cooking results.

› **Clean the exterior and interior** after every use. Crumbs and grease can build up inside and cause smoke or even a fire.

Perfect Pulled Pork
Slow-cooked meat is tender with almost zero effort.

Slow Cooker

A slow cooker requires you to chop and brown ingredients in the morning, but then you can set it and forget it for the entire day—and come home to a hot, ready-to-serve dinner. Designed to simmer foods at a low temperature for hours, it's perfect for soups, stews, and tough cuts of meat.

WHAT IT CAN DO:
SLOW-COOK / STEW

WHAT TO COOK:
STEW / SOUP / CHILI / STOCK / RIBS / OATMEAL

HAMILTON BEACH TEMP TRACKER 33866
$70

87

This cooker earns an Excellent rating for high-temp and low-temp cooking in our tests with beef stew. Its locking lid makes it easier to transport, and a temperature probe prevents overcooked roasts.

CALPHALON DIGITAL SAUTÉ SCCLD1
$100

78

It has a smaller-than-average capacity of 5.3 quarts, but this pot has an easy-to-clean ceramic nonstick coating, unique among models in our ratings. Its stovetop-safe insert can be used on any type of range to sear, sauté, or brown food.

CROCK-POT 6-QUART COOK & CARRY SCCPVL600-S
$30

68

It earns an Excellent score in our low-setting tests, which means it can serve up tender beef and veggies in 8 hours. It's a manual model, so you'll have to make sure you're home when it finishes cooking to turn it off.

PROS

Models with an oblong-shaped pot can fit large roasts for feeding a big family.

A clear glass lid lets you see your meal's progress.

It's simple to use, with just two cooking settings: high or low heat.

CONS

A "big" small appliance, it requires generous counter—and storage—space.

Recipes need adjusting for slow-cooking.

It's limited to wet cooking methods, so there's less variety in the meals you can prepare.

TIPS FROM OUR EXPERTS

› **Frozen meat or poultry** may not have time to fully cook or get up to a safe temperature, so always thaw it first.

› **To avoid overcooked vegetables,** add delicate ones near the end of the cooking cycle, when there's about an hour left to go. And don't use canned or frozen vegetables, because they'll cook too quickly.

› **When converting recipes** for a slow cooker, set sauces and dips on the high setting for 1 to 2 hours. Roasts and large or tough cuts of meat need the low-and-slow treatment for at least 7 hours. Fatty meats such as ground beef or bacon should be cooked and drained before adding to a slow cooker to avoid making the dish greasy.

› **Dairy products break down** during extended cooking, so add them during the last 15 to 30 minutes of cooking.

Air Fryer

Crispy Corn These air-fried cobs are juicy in 14 minutes and ready to soak up garlic-lime butter.

Sous Vide: The Kitchen Water Cure?

Here's a neat party trick. You're hosting a dinner and, for a change, you can join your guests for cocktails on the patio instead of prepping food in a hot kitchen.

What's your secret? It's in the bag—the sous vide bag.

Sous vide (French for "under vacuum") is a cooking method in which food is sealed in a plastic bag and cooked in a hot-water bath to a precise temperature. The device goes in the pot along with the food and circulates the water while maintaining a steady temperature.

That means you can sous vide a pork tenderloin for an hour or so, then quickly sear it on a grill and serve. The meat will be cooked to the

Thanks to the promise of (nearly) guilt-free french fries, the air fryer has solidified its spot as a hot countertop appliance. Using little or no added oil, it relies on a fan to circulate hot air to cook food in a flash. We sampled air-fried fries, chicken wings, and chicken nuggets, and while none had that deep-fried taste, they were still delicious. These appliances can also bake and reheat food.

WHAT IT CAN DO:
"FRY" / ROAST / BAKE / REHEAT

WHAT TO COOK:
FRENCH FRIES / CHICKEN WINGS / VEGETABLES / BAKED EGGS / BANANA BREAD / SALMON / STEAK

PROS

A drawer-style basket makes it easy to use, and the appliance stops cooking when the timer dings.

It reheats food quickly (think of leftover Chinese food or a slice of pizza).

Cleanup is pretty easy for many of the air fryers we tested—and of course there's no oil to discard.

It offers a simple way to add more veggies to your family's diet. Kale chips, anyone?

CONS

There's a learning curve to get food just right, because you can't see it cooking.

Browning may not always be even.

Most models we tested have small capacities. For some foods, you'll have to cook a single layer at a time. So that bag of frozen Tater Tots may require cooking in a few batches.

Some models are noisy, which can be annoying.

TIPS FROM OUR EXPERTS

› **For crispy fries,** cut potatoes into uniform pieces and soak in water for 30 minutes. Then drain, rinse, pat dry, and coat lightly with oil.

› **Pat foods dry** for better browning.

› **Mixing breadcrumbs with a little oil** before coating food may help to make it extra crispy. Coat food liberally, because the whirring fan may cause some of the breadcrumbs to fall off.

› **Avoid overfilling** the basket. It can slow down cooking and keep air from reaching all of the food, giving you uneven results and a soggy meal.

› **Check food often** as it cooks. Staffers who tried the tested air fryers at home found that cooking times sometimes varied from the recommended times in recipes.

› **Flip the food or shake** the basket during cooking for more even results.

PHOTOS, BOTTOM RIGHT: JOHN WALSH/CONSUMER REPORTS (2)

NUWAVE 37001
$130

75

Every air fryer we tested does a good job cooking; the differences are in the conveniences. The NuWave boasts a capacity of 5.8 quarts and has electronic controls that are among the easiest to see and use, but it's on the noisy side.

NINJA AF100
$100

71

This air fryer has a slightly smaller footprint and a capacity of just 3 quarts. The electronic controls with pre-programmed settings are simple to use. It's on the noisy side, but cleaning the inside and outside is fairly easy.

FARBERWARE HF-919B
$70

71

The top performer among the models under $100 we tested, this Farberware is also among the quietest. The capacity is 3.2 quarts. The basic dials are fairly easy to use, but the food basket is tough to clean.

same temperature throughout—and won't be overdone. We evaluated two models, and both delivered perfectly tasty results.

THE ANOVA PRECISION
$100-$149

An adjustable clamp makes it easy to use with various-sized pots, and it's a cinch to clean. The WiFi and the Bluetooth versions let you manually set cooking time and temperature. But at almost 15 inches long, it may not store easily in a kitchen drawer.

CHEFSTEPS JOULE SOUS VIDE COOKER
$199

We found it harder to attach this model to a pot and to clean it, but it heats the water a bit faster. To set its time and temp, you have to use an app on your smartphone. It measures 11 inches long and is slimmer than the Anova.

Food Processor

This workhorse can chop, slice, shred, and purée many different ingredients. If you regularly cook for a crowd or like to prepare multiple batches of a recipe, you might want a bigger model, with a capacity of 11 to 16 cups. Otherwise, a 7-cup model is fine for most tasks and takes up less space.

WHAT IT CAN DO: DICE / CHOP / SLICE / EMULSIFY / BLEND / KNEAD DOUGH

WHAT TO MAKE: SAUCES / PURÉES / SALSA / DOUGH / GROUND MEAT / COLESLAW / NUT BUTTER / BREADCRUMBS / HUMMUS

Pretty Pesto
Pine nuts, Parmigiano, and basil can be quickly turned into a sauce.

PROS

Greatly reduces prep time for chopping vegetables, nuts, herbs, and more.

Can slice practically any food thinner and more uniformly (not to mention more quickly) than you can by hand.

Emulsifies ingredients in seconds for smooth mayonnaise and creamy dressings.

CONS

It can be noisy when operating.

Sharp, curved blades can be tricky to clean. (Some are dishwasher-safe, but take care when loading and unloading them.)

It's difficult to process small amounts (say, a few cloves of garlic) unless your machine has a mini-bowl attachment.

BREVILLE SOUS CHEF BFP800XL/A
$400

81

The 16-cup Sous Chef does everything well, including slicing, shredding, and grating. It comes loaded with accessories, including a mini-bowl attachment and whipping blade that pack up nicely in a storage case.

OSTER PRO 1200 BLSTMB-CBF-000
$90

69

For a budget buy, this 5-cup food processor delivers solid performance and is among the best at grating. It's also two appliances in one: There's a 6-cup blender jar included. In our tests, it earns a Very Good rating for making icy drinks and for crushing ice.

CUISINART ELITE COLLECTION 2.0 FP-12BCN
$200

67

Along with the shredding and slicing disk, this 12-cup model comes with an interchangeable dough blade and a 4-cup bowl to handle small jobs like chopping a handful of herbs or nuts. It earns a Very Good score for chopping and shredding.

TIPS FROM OUR EXPERTS

› **Always set the blade** in the work bowl before adding food. And let hot liquids cool down before adding them.

› **Use the pulse function** to get an even chop and avoid overprocessing. Otherwise, onions and other foods with a high water content can quickly turn into a purée.

› **Periodically stop and scrape down** the sides of the bowl with a spatula for a more homogenous mixture.

› **When making soup,** strain out the cooked vegetables from the stock pot and purée them in the work bowl. They'll blend smoother without liquid.

› **For easier blade cleanup** after making dough, return the empty bowl to the motor base with the blade attached and pulse once. Excess batter will spin right off the blade.

› **Partially freeze meats and cheeses** before shredding or grating for the best results.

Ratings › **Cream of the Countertop Crop** Check out the performance and dimensions of a group of appliances that might become your go-to meal makers.

Recommended	Rank	Brand & Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results: Pressure cooking	Slow-cooking	Rice-cooking	Steaming	Sautéing	Convenience	Features & Specs: Size (qt.)	Total weight (lb.)	Dimensions HxWxD (in.)	Nonstick pot	Dishwasher-safe insert	Dishwasher-safe lid
		MULTI-COOKERS WITH PRESSURE-COOKING MODE														
✓	1	**Breville** Fast Slow Pro 6-Qt. BPR700BSS	81	$250	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	❙	🔼	6.0	12	14x14x14	●	●	●
✓	2	**Instant Pot** Max 6-Qt.	80	$200	⏫	❙	🔼	🔽	🔼	🔼	6.0	13	13x14x14		●	●
✓	3	**Ninja** Foodi OP302	79	$230	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	⏫	❙	6.5	21	13x17x15	●	●	
	4	**Instant Pot** DUO60 7-in-1 6-Qt.	75	$100	⏫	❙	🔼	🔽	🔼	🔼	6.0	11	13x14x13		●	
	5	**Crock-Pot** 6-Qt. Express Crock SCCPPC600-V1	69	$70	⏫	❙	🔼	❙	❙	🔼	6.0	12	14x14x13	●	●	
		MULTI-COOKERS WITHOUT PRESSURE-COOKING MODE														
✓	1	**Instant Pot** Gem 6-Qt. 8-in-1 Programmable GEM65 V2	76	$80	NA	🔼	🔼	🔼	❙	🔼	6.0	10	10x17x12	●	●	●
	2	**Ninja** Cooking System with Auto-iQ CS960	72	$95	NA	⏫	🔼	🔼	🔽	🔼	6.0	12	11x18x14	●	●	●

Recommended	Rank	Brand & Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results: Reheat	Baking	Color range	Toasting time	Full batch	One slice	Ease of cleaning	Ease of use	Features & Specs: Convection oven	Wattage	Temperature range, degrees (F)	Dimensions HxWxD (in.)	Interior dimensions HxWxD (in.)
		TOASTER OVENS															
✓	1	**Breville** BOV650XL Oven	78	$180	🔼	🔼	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫	🔼		1,800	120-450	9x17x15	4x13x10
✓	2	**Breville** Smart Oven Pro BOV845BSS	74	$270	❙	🔼	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫	⏫	⏫	●	1,800	120-500	11x19x16	5x14x13
✓	3	**KitchenAid** Digital Convection Countertop KCO273SS	73	$250	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	●	1,800	150-450	12x18x14	5x13x12
✓	4	**Breville** Smart Oven BOV800XL	73	$250	❙	🔼	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫	⏫	⏫	●	1,800	120-450	19x11x16	5x14x12
✓	5	**Black+Decker** 8-Slice Digital Extra Wide TO3290XSD	72	$100	🔼	🔼	⏫	❙	⏫	⏫	⏫	❙	●	1,500	150-450	11x22x15	6x16x12
✓	6	**Breville** Smart Oven Air Convection BOV900BSSUSC	71	$400	🔼	🔼	⏫	🔽	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	●	1,800	80-480	13x21x18	7x16x12
	7	**DeLonghi** Livenza Stainless EO 241250M	67	$270	🔼	🔼	🔼	❙	❙	⏫	🔼	⏫	●	1,800	170-450	12x19x18	6x13x11
	8	**Cuisinart** Deluxe Convection TOB-135N	66	$160	❙	🔼	⏫	🔼	🔼	❙	🔼	⏫	●	1,800	150-500	10x18x16	5x12x11
	9	**Black+Decker** 4-Slice TO1755SB	66	$35	🔼	🔼	❙	🔼	⏫	🔼	🔼	❙		1,150	Min.-450	9x16x11	4x10x9
	10	**Hamilton Beach** 6-Slice 31411	66	$50	🔼	🔼	🔼	❙	⏫	🔽	🔼	🔼		1,440	Warm-450	9x17x15	4x13x10
	11	**Hamilton Beach** Professional Digital 31240	65	$170	❙	⏫	❙	❙	🔼	⏫	🔼	⏫	●	1,500	150-450	12x20x14	6x14x12
	12	**Cuisinart** Chefs Convection TOB-260N1	63	$260	❙	🔼	⏫	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	⏫	●	1,800	150-500	11x21x17	6x14x13
	13	**Cuisinart** Convection Steam CSO-300N	62	$300	❙	❙	⏫	🔼	🔼	❙	🔼	⏫	●	1,875	125-500	11x20x15	5x12x12
	14	**Krups** DeLuxe Convection OK710D51	60	$120	❙	🔼	🔼	⏬	🔼	❙	🔼	⏫	●	1,500	100-450	12x20x17	6x14x12
	15	**Hamilton Beach** Easy Reach 4-Slice 31334 Oven	59	$35	🔼	❙	⏫	❙	🔼	⏬	🔼	🔼		1,200	200-450	9x16x12	3x10x8

⏬ ⏬ ❙ 🔼 ⏫ POOR — EXCELLENT | ✓ RECOMMENDED | $ CR BEST BUY

Recommended	Rank	Brand & Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results: Convenience	Test Results: High	Test Results: Low	Features & Specs: Size (qt.)	Features & Specs: Total weight (lb.)	Features & Specs: Dimensions HxWxD (in.)	Features & Specs: Dishwasher-safe insert	Features & Specs: Dishwasher-safe lid
		PROGRAMMABLE SLOW COOKERS										
✓	1	**Hamilton Beach** Temp Tracker 33866 6-Qt.	87	$70	▲	▲▲	▲▲	6.0	11	12x17x12	●	●
✓	2	**Crock-Pot** Cook & Carry SCCPVS600ECP-S	84	$100	▲	▲	▲▲	6.0	12	11x17x13	●	●
✓	3	**Crock-Pot** Thermoshield SCCPCT600-B	78	$70	▲	▲	▲	6.0	13	10x19x14	●	●
✓	4	**Calphalon** Digital Sauté SCCLD1	78	$100	▲	▲	▲	5.3	7	10x15x13		●
	5	**All-Clad** SD700450 6.5-Qt. Programmable Oval-Shaped	75	$170	●	▲	▲▲	6.5	17	12x18x13	●	●
	6	**Black+Decker** Digital Programmable SCD1007	72	$50	▲	▲	▲	7.0	14	11x18x12	●	●
	7	**Elite** Platinum MST-900D	72	$60	▲	●	▲	8.5	15	11x17x12	●	●
	8	**KitchenAid** KSC6223	71	$90	▲	▲	▲	6.0	14	11x17x11	●	●
	9	**Hamilton Beach** Flex Cook 33861	67	$60	●	▲	●	6.0	11	11x17x12	●	●
	10	**Cuisinart** PSC-650 Programmable	65	$100	▲	●	●	6.5	15	11x17x13	●	●
		MANUAL SLOW COOKERS										
	1	**Black+Decker** Teal Wave 7 Qt., Dial Control SC2007D	69	$40	●	▲	▲▲	7.0	12	10x18x13	●	●
	2	**Pioneer Woman** 6-Qt. Portable Vintage Floral 33362	68	$40	●	▲▲	▲	6.0	11	10x17x12	●	●
	3	**Crock-Pot** 6-Qt. Cook & Carry Manual Slow Cooker SCCPVL600-S	68	$30	●	▲	▲▲	6.0	11	10x18x13	●	●

Recommended	Rank	Brand & Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results: Controls	Test Results: Noise	Test Results: Cleaning	Test Results: Measured capacity (qt.)	Test Results: Recorded temp. when set to 350° F	Features & Specs: Weight (lb.)	Features & Specs: Claimed capacity	Features & Specs: Dimensions HxWxD (in.)	Features & Specs: Dishwasher-safe
		AIR FRYERS											
✓	1	**NuWave** 6-Qt. 37001	75	$130	▲▲	●	▲	5.8	320	15.0	6 qt.	14x11x16	●
✓	2	**NuWave** Brio Air Fryer 36011	73	$100	▲▲	▲	●	2.6	345	12.0	3 qt.	13x10x14	●
✓	3	**Ninja** AF100	71	$100	▲▲	●	▲	3.0	340	10.0	4 qt.	13x11x14	●
$	4	**Farberware** HF-919B	71	$70	▲	▲▲	●	3.2	360	10.0	3.2 qt.	14x12x15	●
✓	5	**Elite** Platinum EAF-1506D 3.5-Qt. Digital	71	$95	▲	▲	▲	3.4	350	12.0	3.5 qt.	11x12x16	●
	6	**Hamilton Beach** Digital 35050	70	$70	▲▲	▲	▲	2.6	315	9.0	2.5 liters	13x11x14	
	7	**Power** AirFryer XL	70	$100	▲	●	▲▲	5.3	355	12.0	5.3 qt.	14x13x15	●
	8	**Kalorik** With Dual layer rack FT 42139 BK	70	$90	●	▲▲	●	3.2	330	10.0	2 lb.	15x11x14	●
	9	**Oster** DuraCeramic Tilt & Rotate CKSTAF-TECO	69	$140	▲	▲	▲	5.0	NA	12.0	3 liters	13x13x15	●
	10	**Dash** Deluxe DFAF455GBAQ01	69	$100	▲	▲	●	5.6	355	12.0	6 qt.	14x13x15	●
	11	**Cuisinart** AFR-25	68	$100	▲	▲	●	2.1	350	12.0	2.5 lb.	12x13x16	

Recommended	Rank	Brand & Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results: Controls	Noise	Cleaning	Measured capacity (qt.)	Recorded temp. when set to 350° F	Features & Specs: Weight (lb.)	Claimed capacity	Dimensions HxWxD (in.)	Dishwasher-safe
		AIR FRYERS *Continued*											
	12	**Gourmia** Digital Air GAF575	66	$55	⏫	↑	–	3.9	370	9.0	5 qt.	13x11x14	
	13	**Bella** Hot Air Fryer 14538	66	$60	↑	↑	↑	2.5	365	8.0	2.6 qt.	13x10x14	●
	14	**Chefman** Digital 2.5-Liter	64	$80	–	↑	↑	2.7	340	10.0	2.5 liters	12x11x14	●
	15	**Magic Chef** XL Air Fryer With Touch Controls MCAF56DB	63	$110	–	–	↑	5.5	365	11.0	5.6 qt.	14x13x16	●

Recommended	Rank	Brand & Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results: Chopping	Slicing	Shredding	Puréeing	Grating	Noise	Features & Specs: Claimed capacity (cups)	Weight (lb.)	Controls	Height (in.)	Wattage	Dishwasher-safe
		FOOD PROCESSORS														
✓	1	**Breville** Sous Chef BFP800XL/A	81	$400	⏫	⏫	⏫	↑	⏫	↑	16	19.3	Touch button	15	960	●
✓	2	**Cuisinart** Custom 14 DFP-14BCNY	71	$180	⏫	↑	↑	–	↑	⏫	14	14.8	Lever	15	720	●
✓	3	**Cuisinart** Prep 9 9-Cup DLC-2009CHBMY	70	$150	↑	⏫	↑	–	↓	⏫	9	11.7	Touch button	15	600	●
	4	**Oster** Pro 1200 Plus Food Processor Attachment BLSTMB-CBF-000	69	$90	↑	↑	↑	↑	⏫	–	5	6.0	Touch button	15	1200	● (Except adapter)
	5	**Cuisinart** Elite Collection 2.0 FP-12BCN	67	$200	↑	⏫	↑	–	–	⏫	12	15.5	Touchpad	16	1000	●
	6	**Cuisinart** Prep 11 Plus DLC-2011CHBY	67	$180	↑	–	↑	–	↑	↑	11	13.4	Touch button	15	625	●
	7	**Hamilton Beach** 8-Cup Stack & Snap 70820	67	$100	↑	↑	⏫	–	↑	–	8	7.9	Levers	16	450	●
	8	**Cuisinart** DLC-6	66	$125	⏫	↑	↑	–	–	–	8	4.7	Dial	15	350	●
	9	**Cuisinart** Elite Die-Cast 16-Cup	65	$300	↑	↑	–	–	–	⏫	16	18.5	Touch button	18	840	●
	10	**Breville** Sous Chef 12 BFP660 SIL	64	$300	↑	⏫	↑	–	–	↑	9	15.9	Touch button	17	1000	
	11	**Oster** Versa 1100 Series Performance	64	$150	⏫	⏫	↑	–	↓	–	5	6.5	Dial and touch button	18	1100	●
	12	**KitchenAid** 11-Cup With ExactSlice KFP1133	62	$250	↑	↑	↑	–	–	↑	11	8.6	Touch button	17	360	●
	13	**Cuisinart** Elemental 11 FP-11GM	62	$150	↑	↑	↑	–	–	–	11	7.7	Touch button	16	550	●
	14	**Hamilton Beach** 10-Cup With Compact Storage 70760	59	$50	↑	–	↑	–	↑	–	10	5.1	Rocker switch	15	500	●
	15	**Hamilton Beach** 70730	58	$50	↑	↑	⏫	↓	↑	↓	10	4.6	Dial	15	450	●

› All-Access and Digital members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/appliances.

HOW WE TEST: The **Overall Score** for **multi-cookers** combines results from our tests cooking a variety of dishes in the following modes: **Pressure-cooking** (if the model had that feature), **Slow-cooking**, **Rice-cooking, Steaming,** and **Sautéing.** We evaluate ease of controls, cleaning, and more to rate **Convenience.** For **toaster ovens,** we bake muffins and cookies, check to see how well the appliances reheat, evaluate them for ease of use and cleaning, and put them through four separate toasting tests. The **Overall Score** for **slow cookers** takes **Convenience** into account, as well as our tests on the **High** and **Low** settings, in which we cook beef stew for 5 and 8 hours, respectively. For **air fryers,** we assess how easy it is to use the **Controls,** measure **Noise** during operation, and judge ease of **Cleaning.** To test **food processors,** we evaluate how well they **chop** almonds and onions, **slice** veggies, **shred** carrots and cheddar cheese, **purée** peas and carrots, and more.

5 STEPS TO PROTECT YOUR HOME

Do you have enough homeowners insurance? Are you paying too much? We'll help you fine-tune your most important coverage to make sure your home and its contents are well-protected at the best price.

BY TOBIE STANGER

ILLUSTRATION BY SINELAB

1. Close any gaps in your coverage.

There are no state-mandated requirements for homeowners coverage (as there are for auto insurance in most states), and a mortgage lender may only require you to insure for 80 percent of the replacement value of your home. But being underinsured could leave you on the hook for a significant sum, especially if you need to completely rebuild. For maximum protection, CR recommends that you insure for the full replacement cost of your house.

The value of the added protection is well worth the added cost, says Gary Blackwell, who owns an independent insurance agency in Corinth, Maine. "Instead of insuring a $500,000 home for $400,000," he says, "adding an additional $100,000 in coverage for, say, roughly $100 a year is a good deal."

Remember that a homeowners policy won't cover damage from normal wear and tear, which is why it's important to maintain your home. For instance, your insurer would cover a leaky roof and related problems caused by a fallen tree limb, but it wouldn't cover damage caused by a roof that leaked because it was poorly maintained. Ditto for damage from infestations of pests, like termites.

2. Find ways to lower your premiums.

Try one or more of these proven ways to bring down the cost of your premiums.

SHOP AROUND. In our Summer 2018 homeowners insurance survey, more than 10,000 Consumer Reports members—out of more than 81,000 respondents—said they'd changed carriers in the previous three years. More than half of those who switched said they did so because they got a better price.

Some state insurance departments publish rate comparisons. Floridians, for instance, can go to floir.com; Californians, to insurance.ca.gov. You can also get quotes from an independent agent who sells policies from several insurance companies. (Find one at independentagent.com.)

Comparison-shopping sites such as Insure.com, NetQuote, and SelectQuote are also good places to look for coverage. Note, though, that our top-rated companies—USAA (for military members, veterans, and their eligible relatives) and Amica—use their own agents, and their homeowners insurance isn't included in shopping sites. You'll have to apply directly with each of them to get quotes.

"BUNDLE" COVERAGE. Purchasing your homeowners and auto coverage from the same company can provide savings of up to 30 percent overall.

RAISE YOUR DEDUCTIBLE. Higher deductibles equal lower premiums. Going to a $1,000 deductible from $500, for instance, can shave up to 25 percent off your premium, says the Insurance Information Institute, an industry organization.

MAKE HOME IMPROVEMENTS. Replacing old plumbing or adding a security system and water- or gas-leak detection sensors can each provide insurance savings of 2 to 6 percent or more. Replacing a roof with an impact-resistant one can save up to 35 percent in some states. Cutting back dry brush around dwellings and outbuildings in a fire-prone area can earn you a 5 percent break on your premium.

3. Boost your liability protection.

The liability insurance limit included in homeowners policies (to cover costs and damages resulting from lawsuits) usually starts at $100,000. But depending on where you live, you could

COVER YOUR ASSETS

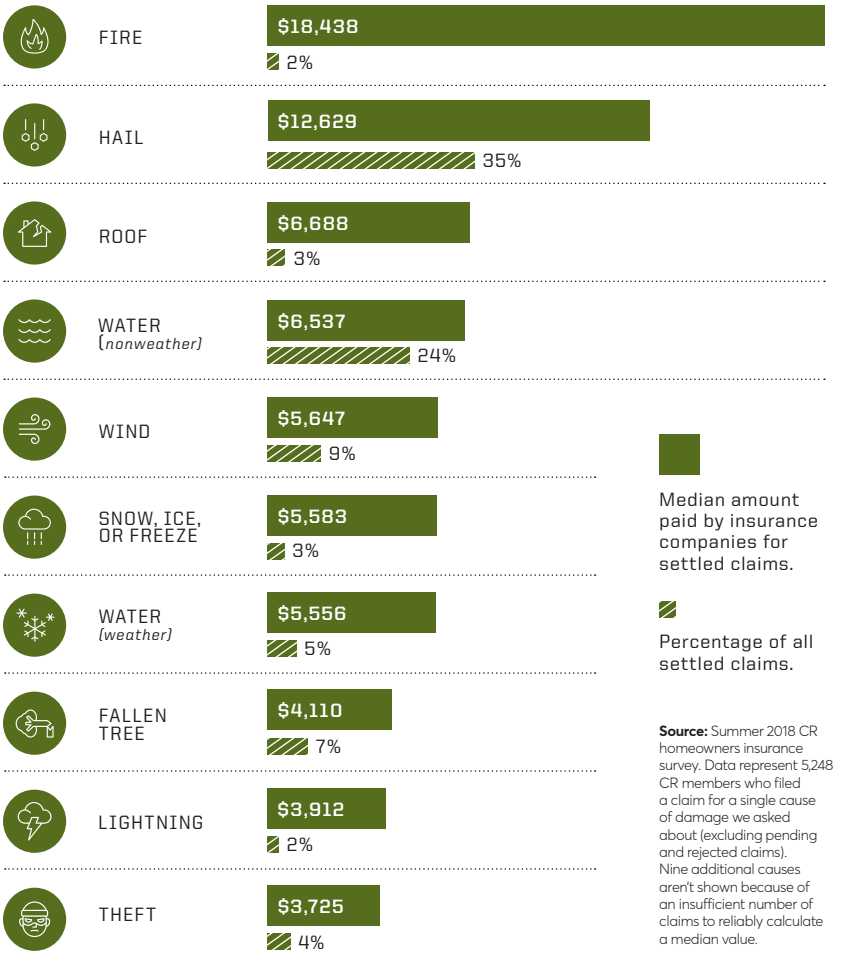
Options, add-ons, and separate coverages will increase the cost of a standard policy. But they could save you a lot of money in the long run.

SEWER BACKUP
This coverage would protect you if, say, a municipal line failure caused sewage to back up into your home, says Loretta Worters, a spokeswoman for the Insurance Information Institute. (Sewage backup could also be caused by tree roots growing into the sewer line.) The cost is $40 to $100 a year.

EARTHQUAKE, HAIL, AND WINDSTORM
In our 2018 homeowners insurance survey, 6,940 CR members said they'd filed a claim in the past three years. According to those claimants, hail was the leading cause of damage. Depending on your state, you may have to pay a separate deductible for hail damage or buy stand-alone coverage. The same is true for earthquakes and high-speed windstorms.

EXTENDED REPLACEMENT COSTS
This will pay 10 to 50 percent above the limit of coverage if building costs soar following a major disaster. Guaranteed replacement cost coverage is a pricier option, but one that

WHAT ARE THE MOST COSTLY CLAIMS?



Source: Summer 2018 CR homeowners insurance survey. Data represent 5,248 CR members who filed a claim for a single cause of damage we asked about (excluding pending and rejected claims). Nine additional causes aren't shown because of an insufficient number of claims to reliably calculate a median value.

ICONS: ELIAS STEIN

be sued for nearly all of your assets—including investments, real estate, and personal property. So increase your liability limit if the value of your assets exceeds $100,000.

Your safest bet is to buy coverage worth at least as much as your assets. Umbrella or excess liability coverage can provide this added protection. It increases your liability protection beyond the limits of your home and auto policies in case you're sued for accidental injury or property damage. It can also cover additional perils, including lawsuits against you for libel or slander. To get it, you may have to raise the liability coverage limits on your auto and home policies first. A $1 million umbrella liability policy generally costs a few hundred dollars a year. Buying more umbrella coverage can be cost-effective. State Farm, for instance, says that on average, raising $1 million in coverage to $2 million costs 75 percent of the additional premium.

4. Consider flood coverage, even in a low-risk area.

Homeowners policies will cover flooding only if it's caused by a pipe or other system that breaks in your home. Protection against flooding and mudflows originating from the outside may pay to replace your home regardless of the cost. Benefits can vary depending on the state and insurance carrier, so be sure to check the details before purchasing.

CONTENTS REPLACEMENT COSTS
A standard policy may reimburse only the depreciated, or "actual cash value," of stolen or damaged home contents. To avoid having to pay the difference when replacing possessions, opt for replacement cost coverage. Document the contents of your home by making a video inventory of your possessions, and store it somewhere safe, such as in the cloud or on a thumb drive kept in a safe deposit box.

ADDITIONAL VALUABLES
Homeowners policies typically put dollar limits on what an insurer will pay to replace valuables such as furs, firearms, jewelry, and home-based business property. For instance, you'd get at most $2,500 to replace stolen jewelry. (These lower limits often apply only to theft.) So buy a "floater" to supplement coverage on costly items. Raising the limit on jewelry coverage to $5,000 from $2,500, for instance, costs about $17 annually with State Farm.

ORDINANCE OR LAW ENDORSEMENT
These can provide the extra coverage required to pay for the cost of rebuilding in compliance with updated local building codes, as can be the case when repairing or replacing an older home.

INFLATION PROTECTION
Make sure your policy includes an "inflation guard" feature or rider that automatically raises your coverage to reflect annual increases in home-building costs.

Provider	Reader Survey Results						
	Overall satisfaction score	Damage amount	Agent courtesy	Timely payment	Promptness of response	Simplicity of the process	Ease of reaching an agent
Amica	94	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃
USAA	92	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃
Auto-Owners	89	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃
Erie	88	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃
MetLife	85	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃
State Farm	85	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃
Auto Club Group	84	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃
Nationwide	84	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃
Travelers	83	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃
Farmers	83	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃
Allstate	82	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃
Hartford	82	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃
Liberty Mutual	81	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	–	⌃
American Family	79	–	⌃	⌃	⌃	–	⌃

HOW WE SURVEY: The ratings are based on responses from 6,940 CR members in our Summer 2018 survey who reported on satisfaction with their experience when they filed a homeowners insurance claim. For the **Overall satisfaction score,** 100 means all respondents were completely satisfied, 80 means very satisfied, 60, somewhat satisfied, on average. (Differences of fewer than 7 points are not meaningful.) Other rating categories under **Reader Survey Results** reflect average scores on a 6-point satisfaction scale ranging from completely satisfied to completely dissatisfied. Findings reflect the experiences of CR members, not necessarily those of the general U.S. population.

must be covered by flood insurance. National flood insurance, provided by the federal government, insures dwellings for up to $250,000 and contents for up to $100,000; it's mainly sold through private agents. (You can buy additional coverage through a private flood insurance carrier.) While the average national flood insurance premium is about $700 annually, the premium for a low- to moderate-risk property could cost an affordable $325 a year. Given the price of coverage–and the fact that about a quarter of flood claims come from low- to moderate-risk areas–it's a worthwhile expense for many people.

Go to floodsmart.gov for an estimate of what it will cost to cover your home.

5. Be savvy about submitting claims.

Making multiple claims in a short period will probably trigger a rate increase or even cause your insurer not to renew your policy. "Making three claims in two years, for instance, shows you have a proclivity for claims," says Loretta Worters, a spokeswoman for the Insurance Information Institute.

Half of surveyed CR members who filed a claim in the past three years said they saw no subsequent premium increase. Only 12 percent had hikes of $200 or more annually. That suggests there's not much of a downside to filing a single claim. If you file infrequently, an insurer isn't going to raise your rate or decline to renew your policy as a result, Worters says.

Still, avoid making claims of just a few hundred dollars above the deductible, Gary Blackwell says. Doing so might erase discounts you're getting for remaining claim-free. If you're dealing with an independent agent, discuss the pros and cons with him or her before you report. As Blackwell points out, "We look at the entire picture."

STAY AHEAD OF THE CURVE WITH CR AUTO RATINGS, NEWS & ADVICE™

ROAD REPORT

AHEAD OF THE CURVE

Toyota Fixes Safety Issues

Toyota has announced that it's adding a safety feature to most of its 2020 models to help prevent deaths from carbon monoxide poisoning. Several owners of Toyotas with keyless ignitions have died of CO poisoning over the past decade, including a Florida couple who perished in their home after mistakenly leaving their 2017 Toyota Avalon running in the garage.

Toyota is also adding a fix to prevent rollaways caused when drivers fail to put their car into Park. (CR subtracts points from a vehicle's Overall Score if its electronic gear selector doesn't have safeguards to prevent rollaways.)

Several automakers, including Ford and GM, made changes to prevent those kinds of incidents years ago.

ASK OUR EXPERTS

Which SUVs have the best pedestrian detection systems?

Many vehicles are now being equipped with systems that alert drivers to pedestrians and **automatically brake to avoid a crash** or reduce its severity. (CR gives points to models that have them as standard.) The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, which recently began testing the systems, **gave the following SUVs a Superior rating.**

Subaru Forester	Honda CR-V	Toyota RAV4	Volvo XC40
89 OVERALL SCORE	77 OVERALL SCORE	77 OVERALL SCORE	59 OVERALL SCORE

THE VITAL STATISTIC

20%

Average gain in fuel efficiency (equal to about 7.5 mpg) for current hybrid vehicles over the previous generation—an impressive accomplishment, especially in only 5 or 6 years.

Source: Consumer Reports Auto Test Center.

RECALL

Ford Explorer

Ford is recalling 1.2 million Explorer SUVs built at its Chicago assembly plant from May 17, 2010, through Jan. 25, 2017, because a suspension component can fail. If it does, drivers may lose some steering control, raising the risk of a crash. The automaker says Explorers that frequently travel over rough terrain or pavement are the most likely to experience this problem.

What to do: Dealerships will replace the part and align the rear suspension at no charge to owners. For more information, call customer service at 866-436-7332. The Ford reference number for this recall is 19S17.

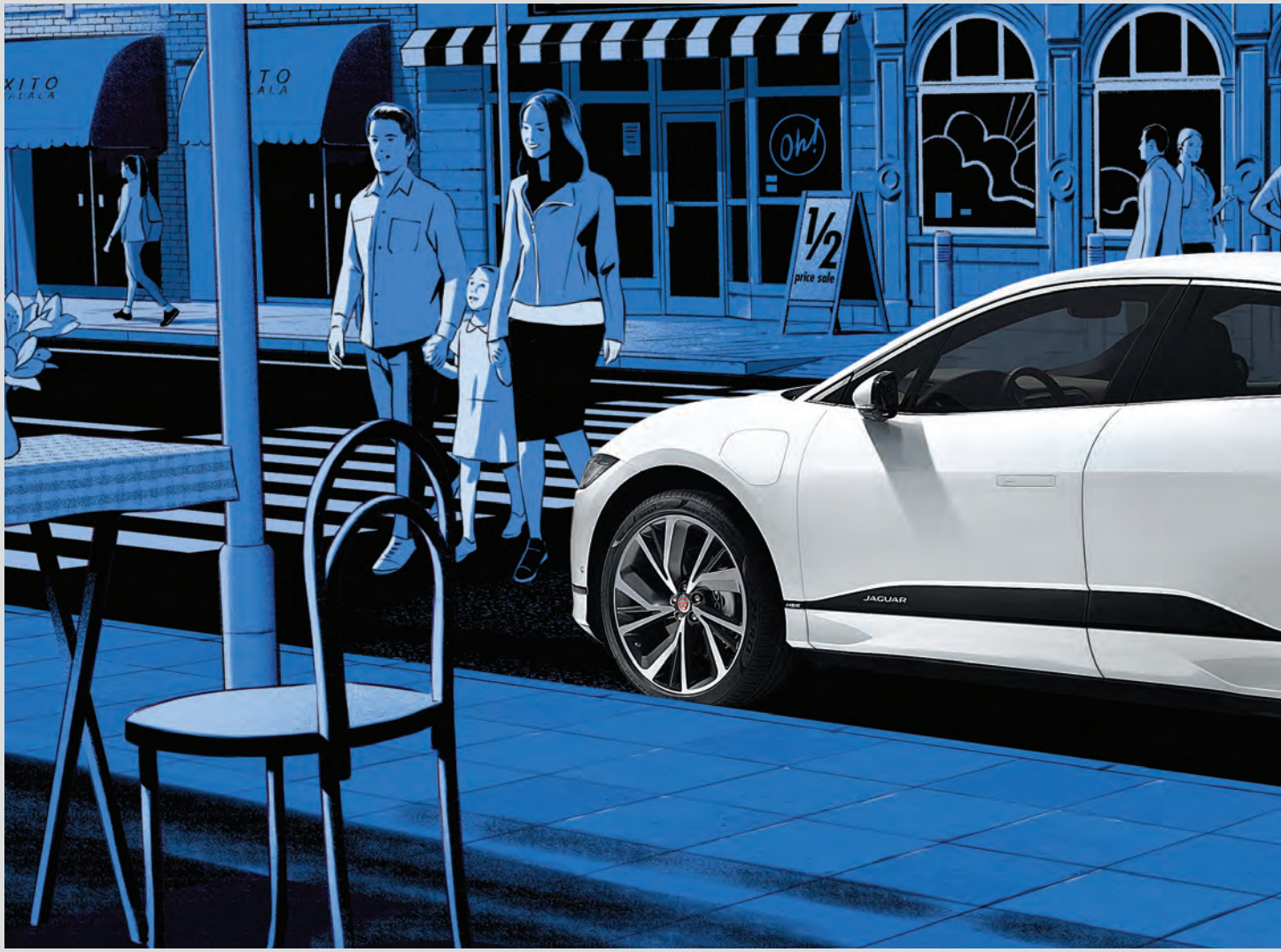
TIP FROM OUR TEST TRACK

A Fast Way to Save on Gas

Summer gas prices have been low, but who doesn't want to save even more, especially on long road trips? The fastest route to gas savings is to slow down.

We measured gas mileage while driving at a steady 55, 65, and 75 mph. The drop in fuel economy while speeding up from 55 to 65 was as much as 8 mpg. Increasing the speed to 75 cut fuel efficiency by an additional 5 to 7 mpg. Overall, speeding up from 55 to 75 mph is like moving from a compact car to a large SUV.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MATTHEW HOLLISTER



The Electric Car Comes of Age

If you want to join the EV revolution, you have more choices than ever, and across a range of budgets. See our ratings of what's available now—and learn what's coming soon.

by Jonathan Linkov

A Growing Breed The Jaguar I-Pace is one of a new set of electric vehicles with ranges that top 200 miles.

ELECTRIC VEHICLES ARE becoming more visible on American roads, thanks to new manufacturer investment, batteries that are more technologically advanced and less expensive, and a higher consumer comfort level. This year, five automakers have introduced EVs that can deliver more than 200 miles of range. By the end of 2020, automakers plan to introduce eight more. Compare that with last year, when there were only 14 EVs on the market, and just four could reliably get more than 200 miles on a full battery charge.

The biggest change to the marketplace, however, is that unlike a decade ago, vehicles no longer sit in only two camps: less expensive EVs with short range and compromised comfort and space, and very expensive EVs that offer more range but with big luxury-car prices. American car shoppers can now find EVs across a range of prices and automakers.

"Over the next couple of years, there should be several models in that sub-$35,000 range, after tax credits are applied," says Shannon Baker-Branstetter, CR's manager, cars and energy policy, who studies the electric vehicle market. "That is definitely in the range that a lot of new-car buyers are looking at."

Though EVs still make up a small percentage of the passenger vehicle market–about 1.3 percent of the new vehicles sold in 2018–there has been explosive growth in sales: In 2010, just 1,919 EVs were sold in the U.S. By 2018, sales hit 233,411, thanks in large part to the popularity of Tesla's Model 3.

Analysts expect the electric boom to continue and for the EV market share to increase. Research and analytics firm IHS Markit estimates that the share of EVs sold in the U.S. will grow to 7.6 percent of the market

ILLUSTRATIONS BY SEÑOR SALME

in 2025, driven by consumer interest, expanding charging infrastructure, and cities and countries that have enacted regulations that favor electrification.

American consumers have told us that they're open to buying EVs: 36 percent of prospective car buyers in the Consumer Reports 2019 Plug-In Electric Vehicles survey said they would consider getting a plug-in electric vehicle for their next new car.

Driving Forces

According to Scott Shepard, a senior analyst at automotive research and consulting firm Navigant, regulatory pressure in Europe and China, as well as in select U.S. states and Canadian provinces, is the strongest driver of EV growth. "Emission standards will continue to get stricter, with eventual bans on new internal-combustion-engine sales in some cities and countries," he says.

Stephanie Brinley, IHS Markit principal automotive analyst, notes that nations worldwide are pushing hard to lower emissions from cars. "You can expect regulations will get harder, and they will get tougher," she says.

U.S. sales of EVs have been driven in part by California's air-quality standards—and because nine other states also have adopted those Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) standards, says Baker-Branstetter. Those sales are driven by the interplay between state incentives and national policy, Shepard says: "If federal policy weakens relative to the ZEV state policies, the incentive for automakers to sell EVs in non-ZEV states diminishes." He adds that the charging infrastructure and consumer awareness of EVs are particularly low in states that don't adhere to the standards.

A Way to Save Money

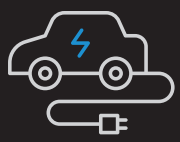
One big draw for shoppers has been tax credits, which can lower the overall cost of buying an EV. These tax credits are subtracted from the adjusted gross income on the tax return buyers prepare the following year, reducing the total income on which they must pay federal taxes.

Federal tax credits were introduced in 2010 as a way to encourage interest in EVs. These credits are based on the vehicle's size and battery capacity, and max out at $7,500. The full credit is available until a manufacturer has sold 200,000 qualified EVs. After that, the credits phase out—they drop to a maximum of $3,750 for six months, then to a max of $1,875 for six months, before going away for good. All EVs currently for sale, except for GM and Tesla models, qualify for the full tax credit. As of July 1, Tesla buyers were able to claim only $1,875. Tesla's federal tax credit expires at the end of this year. GM's tax credit is $3,750 until Oct. 1, when the amount drops to $1,875, then goes away for good in April.

Similarly, some state credits have either been eliminated or are beginning to phase out. Georgia repealed its $5,000 EV tax credit in 2015, and EV sales in the state plummeted. EV tax credits in Colorado are scheduled to

[CONT. ON PAGE 59]

THREE LEVELS OF ELECTRIFICATION



BUYERS who choose an "electrified" vehicle to "go green" can find the word has different meanings. There are different levels of electrification, each with its own pros and cons.

Hybrids, such as the Toyota Prius, use a gasoline engine that's teamed with an electric motor. The battery pack that supplies the motor is charged by the engine and regenerative brakes. This typically results in strong fuel economy. "The car has very limited all-electric capability," says Gabe Shenhar, associate director of CR's auto test program. "But the benefit is that the car is always ready to go, and the owner doesn't need to bother with plugging in or think about when and where to charge."

A plug-in hybrid is like a traditional hybrid but with a bigger battery. This allows the vehicle to drive solely on electricity for longer distances and at higher speeds for 20 to 48 miles, without using the gas engine.

"Pure" EVs don't use a gas-powered engine at all; just plug them into a wall outlet. The EVs with the biggest batteries can travel more than 200 miles before they need to be recharged. However, taking really long trips in an EV requires some planning, because electric charging stations aren't nearly as common as gas stations. And charging at any level requires a time commitment.

Hyundai Kona Electric

Electric Vehicles Under $60,000

The field of more reasonably priced electric cars is growing. Here are the five EV models under $60,000 that CR has rated, ranked by Overall Score.

Hyundai Kona Electric

78 OVERALL SCORE	RELIABILITY
76 ROAD TEST	$36,950 STARTING MSRP
	258 RANGE IN MILES

The Hyundai is one of the best among the affordable EVs, with a robust range of 258 miles and the practicality of a small SUV. It's much quicker and quieter than the regular Kona, and it's enjoyable to drive. See the full test results on page 63.

Chevrolet Bolt

71 OVERALL SCORE	RELIABILITY
76 ROAD TEST	$36,620 STARTING MSRP
	250 RANGE IN MILES

The Bolt's long range, nimble handling and quick acceleration make it a solid choice among EVs. We wish that Chevrolet would shorten the charge time and improve the front seats and ride comfort.

BMW i3

70 OVERALL SCORE	RELIABILITY
70 ROAD TEST	$44,450 STARTING MSRP
	153 Electric-Only RANGE IN MILES

The i3 stands out because it handles well and is very reliable. Otherwise, this diminutive EV has a short electric driving range, it's hard for rear passengers to get in and out, and it has very limited cargo space.

Tesla Model 3

65 OVERALL SCORE	RELIABILITY
82 ROAD TEST	$39,900 STARTING MSRP
	310 RANGE IN MILES

The Model 3 is agile and fun to drive, and has comfortable front seats and a long driving range. However, its stiff ride and distracting controls hurt the overall experience. Tesla also has low brand reliability.

Nissan Leaf

64 OVERALL SCORE	RELIABILITY
62 ROAD TEST	$29,990 STARTING MSRP
	140 RANGE IN MILES

The Leaf has a quiet interior, and it's easy to get in and out, plus it has standard automatic emergency braking. But some versions have a short driving range. Its handling is a bit clumsy, and the driving position is awkward.

Tesla Model S

Electric Vehicles Over $60,000

The luxury EV category was launched by Tesla, and Tesla still dominates in this price range. But Jaguar now offers a model, and others are poised to join the field. Here are the three that CR has rated, ranked by Overall Score.

Tesla Model S

78 OVERALL SCORE

97 ROAD TEST

RELIABILITY

$75,000 STARTING MSRP

335 RANGE IN MILES

The Model S has lightning-quick acceleration and excellent handling, and its long driving range and nationwide Supercharger network let drivers embark on lengthy, worry-free trips. But it takes a while to recharge, its controls are frustrating to use, and its reliability is below average.

Jaguar I-Pace

58 OVERALL SCORE

76 ROAD TEST

RELIABILITY

$69,500 STARTING MSRP

234 RANGE IN MILES

The I-Pace is agile in corners and quick off the line, making it fun to drive. But despite the luxurious interior, its controls are fussy and distracting. Like all EVs, running costs are low, but the I-Pace doesn't benefit from Tesla's fast-charging network. Jaguar's below-par brand reliability takes a toll on its Overall Score.

Tesla Model X

55 OVERALL SCORE

77 ROAD TEST

RELIABILITY

$81,000 STARTING MSRP

295 RANGE IN MILES

The Model X is a big, heavy SUV, but it accelerates and handles like a much smaller vehicle. However, its overwrought technology—particularly the falcon-wing doors—has caused reliability headaches, and its ride and wind noise can make it tiring to drive.

[CONT. FROM PAGE 56]
drop from $5,000/$2,500 (buy/lease) to $2,500/$1,500 on Jan. 1, 2022.

To keep mainstream EVs affordable, automakers might have to make up the difference for expired credits, says Shepard. Ultimately, every automaker "will have to drop prices if EVs are going to be cost-competitive with internal-combustion-engine vehicles and start to gain real market share," he says.

"The federal tax credit is important in bringing down the purchase price for consumers. It increases access for more consumers and incentivizes automakers to make the long-term investments needed for a faster growth path," says Baker-Branstetter.

How to Shop Smart

Switching to an EV doesn't require a radical change in lifestyle, but buyers should consider a number of factors. At CR's Auto Test Center, we've bought 18 EVs since 2011, and we're on pace to buy six more this year.

Here are some of the top considerations we believe EV shoppers should keep in mind.

HOW FAR CAN IT GO? Driving range is the most important factor to consider, says Gabe Shenhar, associate director of CR's auto test program.

"It's becoming common that new EVs can travel at least 200 miles on a full charge," he says. "EVs aren't just suited for short commutes anymore." These newer EVs with larger batteries mean that range anxiety—the fear of running out of juice before recharging—is fading as a consumer concern.

WHERE CAN I CHARGE IT? Most EV owners will recharge overnight at home using either a 120-volt or a 240-volt charger, so they can commute to and from work without the need for midday charging. But owners who can access a high-speed charger at work can reverse that: They charge the battery during the day, rather than invest in a charger at home. And as EV range increases, owners won't need to fully recharge every day.

WHAT ROLE DOES TEMPERATURE PLAY? Unlike traditional gas-powered vehicles, cabin heat in EVs doesn't come free. It's well-established that in cold weather, EV driving range decreases significantly because energy from the battery is needed to run the heater, unlike a gas-powered engine that produces heat as a byproduct of its operation. Air conditioning has a less severe effect on EV batteries.

WILL A BIG BATTERY EAT UP SPACE? EV powertrains take up less space than a gas-powered vehicle's fuel tank, engine, transmission, and drive shaft—a major advantage.

Automakers typically package the large, heavy EV battery as part of the vehicle's floor, which helps lower the center of gravity, contributing to better handling. The newest EVs have similar—if not greater—interior and cargo room to that of similar conventional vehicles. The Audi E-Tron, BMW i3, Jaguar I-Pace, and Tesla Models 3, S, and X each have a front trunk in addition to storage in the rear.

HOW TO GET CHARGED UP AT HOME

UNLIKE MOST OWNERS of conventional gas cars, EV owners can "refill" at home—just pull into your garage and plug it in. Owners can use a standard outlet, which takes a while, or install a wall charger for a much quicker charge. All electric vehicles come with a 110-volt-compatible, or Level 1, home connector kit. It's essentially a fancy extension cord that allows your car to be plugged into a standard outlet on one end and into the car on the other end.

Consumer Reports recommends that most electric vehicle buyers, especially those purchasing a plug-in hybrid (PHEV) with a small battery, start with just the included cord, rather than invest in a 240-volt, or Level 2, wall-mounted charger.

"Most PHEV owners will not need a Level 2 charger," advises Gil Tal, director of The Plug-in Hybrid & Electric Vehicle Research Center at the University of California, Davis. "The Level 1 charger that is provided with the car can charge the battery back to 100 percent overnight."

Tal adds that Level 1 may be sufficient for many EV owners if they don't drive more than 40 to 50 miles a day. That's farther than the average daily commute for American drivers.

It's worth investing in a wall-mounted charger if you need juice quicker than 110 volts can provide and you don't have convenient access to a public or workplace charger.

Wall units are available online through Amazon, Home Depot, and Lowe's, among others. The cost is typically $500 to $700. Some automakers, such as BMW, offer advice on chargers and coordinate installation. Others leave it for the consumer to figure out.

You'll need an electrician to install a special 240-volt receptacle, like the ones used for most clothes dryers, in your garage. HomeAdvisor shows that parts and labor, beyond the charger itself, can cost up to $2,000.

—Jeff S. Bartlett

10 MORE EVs COMING SOON

ADDITIONAL ELECTRIC VEHICLES are arriving on the market soon, so if your needs aren't met by a Tesla Model 3 or a Chevrolet Bolt, you won't have to wait long for a wider selection. A host of new EVs are going on sale within the next 18 months, and almost every automaker will offer one by 2023, according to market research firm IHS Markit.

These include affordable commuter cars, luxury crossovers, and even pickup trucks that plug in. Many of these new EVs will come from established automakers, but a few startups also have promised new vehicles. Many of these models have federal tax credits available. Here's a model-by-model look at the next generation. **BY KEITH BARRY**

Audi E-Tron
Estimated Range: 204 miles

Rivian R1S SUV
Estimated Range: 400 miles

Polestar 2
Estimated Range: 275 miles

AVAILABLE NOW

Audi E-Tron

MSRP: **$74,800**
RANGE: **204 MILES***

Audi's newest luxury SUV is all-electric, and its size falls between the Q5 and Q8. The automaker says it can go from 0 to 60 mph in 5.5 seconds. We've purchased an E-Tron and will publish test results soon.

Kia Niro EV

MSRP: **$38,500**
RANGE: **239 MILES***

The Niro hatchback was already available as a traditional hybrid and plug-in hybrid. Now, Kia offers an all-electric version. Like the similar Hyundai Kona EV, it's currently available only in select states. We are testing one now.

***ESTIMATED**

COMING SOON

BMW iX3 EV

MSRP: **$72,000***
RANGE: **250 MILES***

As Hyundai did with its Kona Electric, BMW is using a popular SUV as the basis for its new model. This X3-based SUV promises fast charging and luxury appointments. It's scheduled to go on sale in 2020.

Kia Soul EV

MSRP: **$36,000***
RANGE: **243 MILES***

This isn't the first time we've seen an electric version of the practical, boxy Soul. But unlike its short-range predecessor, this new model shares a powertrain with the Niro EV and the Hyundai Kona Electric, and can go much farther on a full charge.

Mercedes-Benz EQC

MSRP: **$75,000***
RANGE: **200 MILES***

The first car in Mercedes' new luxury EV lineup is the EQC SUV. Like other new luxury EVs, the EQC is capable of fast DC charging—it can reportedly get from a charge of 10 percent to 80 percent in as fast as 40 minutes. It uses the same confusing infotainment system as other new Mercedes models, and its unique grille sets it apart from the GLC it is based on.

Polestar 2

MSRP: **$63,000**
RANGE: **275 MILES***

From Volvo's all-electric performance division, the Polestar 2 is an all-wheel-drive hatchback that shares many design elements with newer Volvos. It goes on sale in the U.S. in late 2020.

Porsche Taycan

MSRP: **$90,000-$130,000***
RANGE: **300 MILES***

Porsche is already taking deposits for this sporty, premium EV with ultra-fast charging. It reportedly can add 250 miles of range in less than 20 minutes from an 800-volt charger. It will have more than 600 hp and accelerate from 0 to 60 mph in less than 3.5 seconds, the automaker says.

Rivian R1T Pickup and R1S SUV

MSRP: **$69,000***
RANGE: **400 MILES***

Rivian is a Michigan-based startup that plans to debut an all-electric pickup (the R1T) and a rugged SUV (the R1S) by the end of 2020. In addition to futuristic-looking exteriors, Rivians have unique storage compartments and should be able to drive through up to 3 feet of water, the company says.

Tesla Model Y

MSRP: **$48,000***
RANGE: **300 MILES***

This Model 3-based SUV is scheduled to arrive in late 2020. All-wheel drive is optional, and Tesla says a Performance version should be able to go from 0 to 60 mph in 3.5 seconds.

Volkswagen ID.3

MSRP: **$33,600***
RANGE: **200 MILES***

Details are scarce, but Volkswagen says this electric hatchback will be the first in a family of 20 new EVs. It's scheduled to make its European debut in September.

CAN I GET THERE FROM HERE?

LIFE MAY BE getting easier for electric-vehicle owners looking to recharge.

An ongoing build-out of the national EV-charging network should help reduce consumer fear of running out of charge, known as range anxiety, a potential barrier for consumers converting to plug-in electric vehicles.

Tesla is by far the largest U.S. seller of EVs, and it has built a network of "Superchargers" to match. Tesla has more than 1,533 stations, with more than 13,000 individual chargers worldwide currently or coming soon. It's continuously filling in gaps in its network. In June, the company said it turned on the first of its next-generation "V3" chargers, delivering up to 250 kilowatts of power and up to 75 miles of range per 5 minutes of charging time.

But the chargers work only for the automaker's models. Other companies are building their own networks.

Some companies, such as ChargePoint, EVgo, and Electrify America, are filling out the national network, making longer drives possible for other EV models. The numbers sound impressive: ChargePoint has more than 66,000 charging spots accessible to the public. EVgo claims more than 1,200 "DC fast" chargers nationwide. (DC fast chargers can add up to 90 miles of range in 30 minutes, depending on the EV and the charger.)

Volkswagen is one of the big automakers planning to expand its EV lineup in the coming years. Using a spinoff company called Electrify America, VW is spending $2 billion to build the infrastructure as part of its settlement with the U.S. government over its diesel-emissions cheating scandal.

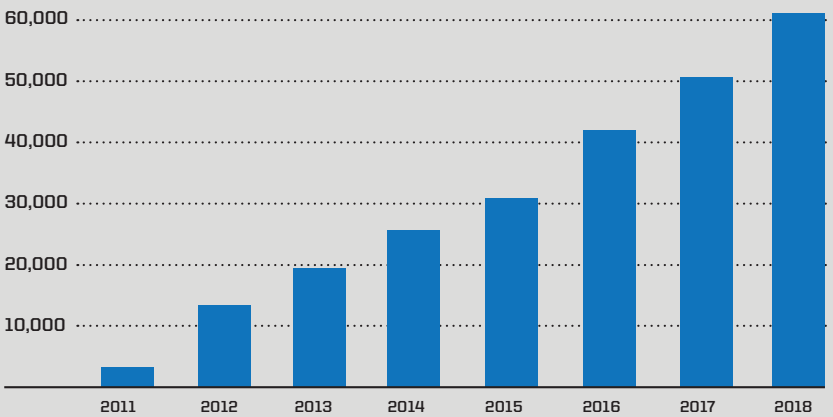
Electrify America is in the second of four phases and said it would complete work on 484 charging stations by June 2019, with locations in 17 metropolitan areas in 42 states and the District of Columbia. With those, the average gap between stations in the network will be 70 miles, the company says.

"We have a chance to actually, finally increase EV adoption in the U.S.," Giovanni Palazzo, president and CEO of Electrify America, told reporters recently. "This is the fastest construction pace, including everyone." Most of the newer stations have DC fast chargers.

Electrify America says it will bring chargers online soon that give cars 20 miles of range per minute of charge time, up from 9 miles a minute for a DC fast charger. The energy throughput on those will be so intense that the company has had to design a new cable with built-in cooling; otherwise, the copper wire would need to be as thick as a fist, company engineers say.

To put the charger-building spree in context: The Department of Energy estimates that there are now 21,876 electric charging stations in the nation, with 65,003 individual charging outlets. Of course, that figure is still dwarfed by the number of gas stations in the U.S.–well over 100,000, according to the National Petroleum

NUMBER OF ELECTRIC CHARGING STATIONS IN U.S.



Source: U.S. Dept. of Energy's Alternative Fuels Data Center.

News MarketFacts 2012 Report.

But discussing the EV-charging network in the same context as gas stations misses the point, says Pasquale Romano, CEO of ChargePoint. EV owners don't need charging stations in the same way that traditional cars need gas stations, because most of the time they're charging at their own garage or at their office, he says.

"When you're charging at home or at work, it's awesome," Romano said in a phone interview. "You don't have the chore of going to the gas station, and you've always got a full battery."

Because recharging an EV takes longer than a fill-up at a gas station, charging stations are often at places where drivers might spend some time, such as highway travel plazas or some big-box-store parking lots.

To see how many chargers are available along any particular route, you can go to websites such as plugshare.com, among others. These sites generate travel maps for all-electric trips, highlighting various charging stations along the way. Google Maps also shows some public charging stations.

Charging Station Setbacks

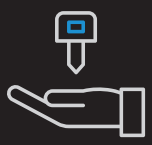
These electric-charging plans sound great, but there are some real-world growing pains. CR's auto testers have frequently found that chargers at newer stations can be out of service. Some networks are more dependable than others, we have found. Other challenges can include long waits for available spots or extended charging times as multiple people plug in at the same time.

Mel Yu, an automotive analyst at Consumer Reports, says the round trip from our Auto Test Center in Colchester, Conn., to New York City typically takes about 4 hours in a gas-powered car and 5 hours in an EV. That's due to the extra recharging time, and the possibility of having to wait for an open charger, he says.

"Now, regardless of the vehicle, EV owners can live without fear of electricity running out, but it still requires some effort and a relaxed attitude about the recharging time," Yu says.

An EV owner who takes at least one 100-mile road trip a month will benefit from a subscription plan from a company such as ChargePoint, EVgo, or Electrify America, Yu says. The monthly fee can pay for itself in a single charging session, he says. Long-distance travelers can benefit from apps, such as PlugShare, that provide maps with the real-time status of available chargers. *–Jeff Plungis*

WHY LEASING MAY BE BEST



FOR MOST AMERICAN car shoppers interested in a pure electric vehicle (EV), the technology can present a host of unfamiliar considerations. For that reason, CR believes leasing, rather than buying, makes the most sense. Here are a few reasons:

NEWEST TECH. Leases have limited ownership periods, usually between two and four years, giving shoppers access to the latest technology because they can turn in the EV at the end of the lease for an upgrade. EV owners are more likely to be technology enthusiasts than the typical new-car buyer is, says Ed Kim, vice president of industry analysis at automotive consulting firm AutoPacific, so they'll want the freshest tech. As with almost any lease, payments are lower than a regular monthly payment for a vehicle purchase.

TAX CREDITS. Another appeal is the availability of tax credits, whether federal or state. Still, shoppers who choose to lease an EV need to pay particular attention to those because it's the leasing company, not the consumer, that's entitled to the credit, says Mel Yu, a CR auto analyst. "They often pass the credit on to the consumer, and that's reflected in a reduced cost for the lease," he says. "But they aren't required to do this, so shoppers should confirm before signing any paperwork."

DEPRECIATION. That's the value a car loses over time. It's a factor for any car buyer, but it hits EVs harder. Yu says EVs depreciate faster than regular cars because tax credits effectively lower the original price of the car, but leases typically factor that into the payment equation. "A vehicle usually loses around 50 percent of its value in three years," says Yu. "Buyers can owe more on their loan than the vehicle is worth." As with any lease, there are restrictions, such as how many miles can be driven and how much wear and tear can be inflicted.

COMPACT SEDANS

Toyota Corolla

Exceptionally Efficient

HYBRID **75** OVERALL SCORE

NON-HYBRID **74** OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 69 (hybrid)/68

HIGHS Fuel economy, ride, controls, standard advanced safety features

LOWS Acceleration, rear seat, access

POWERTRAIN 121-hp, 1.8-liter 4-cylinder hybrid/139-hp, 1.8-liter 4-cylinder engines; continuously variable transmission; front-wheel drive

FUEL 48 (hybrid)/33 mpg on regular fuel

PRICE AS TESTED $24,129 (hybrid)/$23,530

IF STELLAR FUEL ECONOMY, strong brand reliability, and standard advanced safety features are high on your checklist, the all-new Corolla Hybrid could be the choice for you. It gets an impressive 48 mpg overall.

We also tested the redesigned non-hybrid Corolla. Both versions drive better and tackle corners more skillfully than before, thanks to well-weighted steering and limited body lean.

The sharper driving character doesn't come at the expense of ride quality; the Corolla soaks up bumps with the best in the class.

At the same time, these Corollas do little to raise a driver's pulse. Both versions we tested were dismally slow, and their engines were loud and raspy. The cabin ambience is basic and boring. Most controls are easy to use, although the labels for the small buttons that flank the center screen wash out in direct sunlight. Apple CarPlay is standard.

It's hard to get in and out of the low-slung cabin, and rear-seat headroom is snug.

It would take years to recoup the hybrid's $3,000 extra cost (comparing LE trims) through gas savings. And the hybrid doesn't offer blind spot warning (BSW), a safety feature we like. Both cars have standard forward collision warning (FCW), automatic emergency braking (AEB) with pedestrian detection, lane departure warning (LDW), and lane keeping assist (LKA).

The key safety features, along with better-than-average brand reliability, boost the Corolla's Overall Score.

COMPACT ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Hyundai Kona Electric

Long Driving Range and Less Expensive

78 OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 76

HIGHS Range, low running costs, no emissions, acceleration, agility, standard advanced safety features

LOWS Charging times, stiff ride, gear selector, limited availability

POWERTRAIN 201-hp electric motor; 1-speed direct drive; front-wheel drive

RANGE 258 miles

PRICE AS TESTED $42,330

THE KONA ELECTRIC is the best electric vehicle (EV) under $50,000 that we've tested. It blends an enjoyable driving experience with practicality.

Unlike the loud, sluggish gas-powered version, the Kona EV is quiet and quick. It combines on-demand acceleration with spry handling, although its ride can feel stiff.

It's easy to get in and out of the Kona because of its ride height, but a small footprint still makes it easy to park or maneuver. The cabin feels airy, and the cargo area is just as roomy as the gas-powered model. Most controls are easy to use, but there's an unintuitive push-button gear selector that drivers can't operate by feel alone.

The Kona Electric has an EPA-estimated range of 258 miles, more than other affordable EVs, let alone some luxury models that cost twice as much. It starts at $36,950 before rebates or tax credits, and comes standard with Android Auto and Apple CarPlay. It also has standard FCW, AEB, and BSW, which we like.

The battery takes 9 hours to charge from near-empty using a 240-volt charger. Hyundai says a 50kW DC fast charger can bring an empty battery to 80 percent full in about 75 minutes. With such a long range, however, most commuters won't need to fully recharge very often.

Perhaps the biggest drawback is its limited availability. Unlike some other EVs, the Kona Electric is for sale only in select states, mostly in the West and the Northeast.

PHOTOS: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

LUXURY MIDSIZED SUVs

Mercedes-Benz GLE

Confusing Controls and Dull Handling

66
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 80

HIGHS Acceleration, quietness, seat comfort, fit and finish

LOWS Controls, optional running boards that make access difficult

POWERTRAIN 362-hp, 3.0-liter 6-cylinder turbocharged engine; 9-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

FUEL 20 mpg on premium fuel

PRICE AS TESTED $75,090

THE LUXURIOUS GLE holds its own in many ways with its impressive interior, supportive seats, and strong engine. But its distracting controls and lackluster handling might drive shoppers to consider competitors, such as the BMW X5.

We like the cabin's solid assembly and the wood and chrome trim. The dashboard buttons and knobs look and feel impressive, and the blissful silence reflects the GLE's premium price.

Most of the time, the stately ride absorbs bumps well. But on rough pavement there's an unbecoming jiggle and a floating feeling over slight rises when traveling at highway speeds. The GLE feels heavy in corners, mostly because the steering is slow to respond and there's noticeable body roll.

The six-cylinder engine provides plenty of power. But at times the transmission hesitates, and we noticed an occasional bump during downshifts. The 48-volt mild-hybrid system makes the stop/start function work smoothly. We got 20 mpg overall.

The controls present a real roadblock. Many functions are buried deep in multi-level menus; it takes a vexing six steps to adjust the lumbar support. It's easy to accidentally brush against the touchpad between the seats or the tiny touch-sensitive buttons on the steering wheel. That can change the center screen, the gauges, or both at inopportune moments.

The GLE 450 comes standard with FCW, AEB, and BSW, but LKA is part of an option package. The brand's below-average reliability hurt the SUV's Overall Score.

COMPACT SUVs

Toyota RAV4 Hybrid

An SUV Finds Its Hybrid Sweet Spot

80
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 76

HIGHS Fuel economy, standard advanced safety features

LOWS Ride, fit and finish, limited AWD functionality

POWERTRAIN 219-hp, 2.5-liter 4-cylinder hybrid engine; continuously variable transmission; all-wheel drive

FUEL 37 mpg on regular fuel

PRICE AS TESTED $34,193

THE RAV4 IS MEDIOCRE at best, but the RAV4 Hybrid's fuel economy is so impressive that shoppers considering a small, all-wheel-drive SUV should give it a closer look.

The electric propulsion makes the hybrid more pleasant than the conventional RAV4, and it's faster, propelling the SUV from 0 to 60 mph a half-second quicker. The hybrid also gets 37 mpg overall, 10 mpg better than the regular version.

Based on the overall fuel economy, the hybrid would pay back the extra $800 it costs in less than 2½ years for a driver who covers 12,000 miles a year. And that would shorten to about a year for urban drivers, because they'd use the electric drive more often in stop-and-go city traffic.

The powertrain is also quieter than the noisy engine in the regular RAV4.

Otherwise, the hybrid mirrors what we experienced in the regular RAV4: The ride is a bit jumpy but handling is agile. Unlike the all-wheel-drive system on the regular RAV4, the hybrid system lets the front wheels spin when taking off on slippery surfaces. In addition, the AWD system doesn't operate at highway speeds.

The bland interior is essentially the same, with basic seats and hard plastics. To its credit, visibility is good, and the hybrid doesn't give up any cargo space to the battery pack.

The RAV4 Hybrid comes with standard FCW with pedestrian detection, AEB, LDW, and LKA. BSW and rear cross traffic warning are standard on the XLE trim.

PHOTOS: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

Ratings › **Mileage Rewards** Three of the models tested this month accelerate almost to the top of our ratings because of their efficiency and standard safety features.

Recommended	Make & Model	Overall Score	Price As tested	Survey Results: Predicted reliability	Survey Results: Owner satisfaction	Safety: Crash prevention	Road-Test Results: Road-test score	Overall mpg	Acceleration 0-60 mph, sec.	Dry braking 60-0 mph, ft.	Avoidance-maneuver speed, mph	Routine handling	Ride	Noise	Seat comfort front/rear	Controls	Luggage, suitcases+duffels/ cargo volume, cu. ft.
	COMPACT SEDANS																
✓	**Subaru Impreza** Premium	76	$23,410	2	2	Opt.	85	30	9.5	124	56.0	4	4	4	2/4	5	2+2
✓	**Toyota Corolla** LE Hybrid	75	$24,129	4	4	Std./5	69	48	10.3	142	53.0	4	4	2	2/2	4	3+1
✓	**Toyota Corolla** LE	74	$23,530	4	4	Std./5	68	33	10.4	134	53.0	4	4	2	2/2	4	3+1
✓	**Mazda3** Select	74	$24,115	4	4	Opt.	75	30	7.7	125	54.0	4	4	4	4/2	2	3+1
✓	**Honda Civic** EX-T	72	$23,035	4	2	Opt.	75	31	7.1	129	54.5	4	4	2	2/2	2	3+1
✓	**Volkswagen Jetta** SE	69	$23,325	2	2	Opt.	78	34	9.0	135	52.0	4	4	4	4/4	5	3+2
✓	**Hyundai Elantra** SEL	69	$20,090	4	2	Std./4	66	33	9.9	133	54.0	2	2	2	2/2	5	3+1
✓	**Kia Forte** LXS	68	$20,165	2	2	Std./4	67	34	8.3	131	53.0	4	1	1	2/2	5	3+1
	COMPACT SUVs																
✓	**Subaru Forester** Premium	89	$29,341	4	4	Std./5	90	28	9.2	130	53.0	4	4	2	4/5	5	36.5
✓	**Mazda CX-5** Touring (2.5L)	82	$29,530	5	4	Std./2	80	24	8.6	133	54.0	4	4	4	4/4	4	30.5
✓	**Toyota RAV4** Hybrid XLE	80	$34,193	4	4	Std./5	76	37	7.8	139	52.0	4	2	2	4/4	4	30.5
✓	**Honda CR-V** EX (1.5T)	77	$28,935	4	4	Opt.	82	28	8.2	137	52.0	4	2	4	4/5	4	36.0
✓	**Toyota RAV4** XLE (2.5L)	77	$32,109	4	4	Std./5	72	27	8.3	131	54.0	4	2	1	4/4	4	30.5
✓	**Kia Sportage** LX (2.4L)	75	$26,720	2	2	Std./5	78	23	9.6	128	52.5	4	2	2	4/4	5	29.5
✓	**Nissan Rogue** SV	74	$29,920	4	1	Std./5	74	24	9.5	134	54.0	2	4	2	2/4	5	31.5
	Chevrolet Equinox LT (1.5T)	68	$33,730	2	2	Std./4	78	25	9.6	132	53.0	4	4	4	4/4	5	32.0
	Volkswagen Tiguan SE	67	$31,645	1	2	Opt.	84	25	10.3	131	52.0	4	4	4	4/5	4	33.0
	Hyundai Tucson SEL (2.4L)	64	$28,530	1	1	Std./4	75	22	9.6	130	52.5	4	2	4	4/4	5	29.5
	LUXURY MIDSIZED SUVs																
✓	**BMW X5** xDrive40i	88	$68,730	2	5	Std./4	98	23	6.0	129	52.0	4	4	5	5/4	2	36.5
✓	**Audi Q7** Premium Plus	87	$68,695	4	5	Std./4	96	20	6.7	127	50.0	4	4	5	5/5	2	35.5
✓	**Lexus RX** 350	79	$51,630	4	4	Std./5	77	22	7.5	139	49.0	2	5	5	5/4	2	30.0
✓	**Lincoln Nautilus** (2.7T)	75	$54,945	2	2	Std./5	84	18	7.2	128	53.5	4	5	5	4/5	2	32.5
	Porsche Cayenne Base	70	$79,280	1	4	Std./5	87	21	6.5	131	49.5	5	2	5	5/5	1	32.0
	Acura MDX Tech	67	$51,410	1	1	Std./5	79	21	6.8	135	52.0	2	4	4	4/4	1	34.0
	Mercedes-Benz GLE 450	66	$75,090	1	4	Std./5	80	20	6.0	132	51.5	2	4	5	5/5	0	36.5
	Volvo XC90 T6 Momentum	62	$56,805	0	2	Std./5	84	20	7.7	126	52.5	2	2	4	5/5	1	35.0
	COMPACT ELECTRIC VEHICLES																
✓	**Hyundai Kona Electric** Limited	78	$42,330	4	5	Std./4	76	120*	6.6	135	53.5	4	2	4	4/2	2	1+1
✓	**Chevrolet Bolt** Premier	71	$43,155	2	5	Opt.	76	119*	6.8	138	53.0	4	2	5	1/2	4	2+0
	Nissan Leaf SL	64	$38,115	2	5	Std./4	62	112*	8.0	141	53.5	2	2	4	4/2	4	3+0

*Indicates miles-per-gallon equivalent (MPGe).

HOW WE TEST: Recommended models did well in our **Overall Score,** which factors in **Road-Test Results, Predicted reliability, Owner satisfaction,** and **Safety,** which includes crash-test results and the availability of crash prevention features, such as forward collision warning and automatic emergency braking, pedestrian detection, and blind spot warning. NA means no such safety system is offered; Opt. means it's available but not as standard equipment. We also rate models from 1 to 5 based on how many advanced safety features come standard. We deduct points if a model's gear selector lacks fail-safes. Digital or All-Access members can go to CR.org/cars for complete ratings.

WORSE – BETTER | RECOMMENDED

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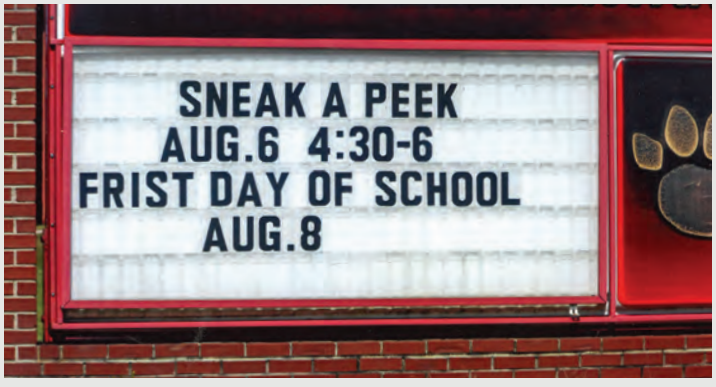
Signs of the Times

These peculiar postings may make you do a double take

Inn-Sufficient Pay
They shouldn't be surprised if they don't get many applications.
Submitted by Jeanne Alexander, seen in Sarasota, FL

Press 6 for Pepperoni
We're not sure this place can deliver on its phone-y promise.
Submitted by Susan Hines, seen in West Warwick, RI

Double Negative
This sign is playing fast and loose with its own rule.
Submitted by Patrick Caputo, seen in Waldoboro, ME



Class Clown?
We don't know whether to laugh or cry at this school's spelling slip-up.
Submitted by Anonymous, seen in Douglas County, GA

SHARE

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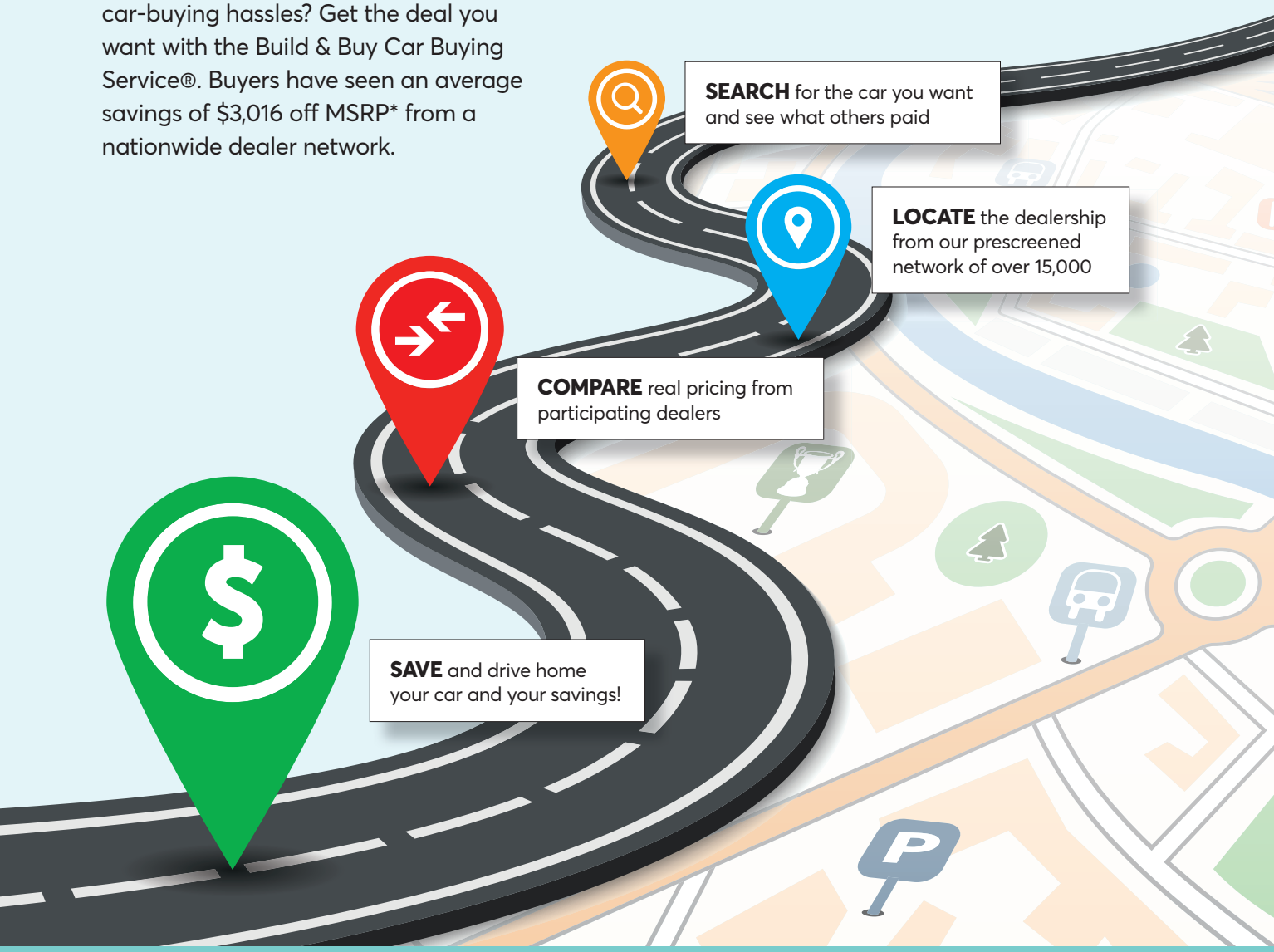
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CRM99BBN

CANADA

Canadian information in 4-page insert

Canada Extra

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Contact Info **34d**

How to Use the Canada Extra Section

EVERY MONTH, Canada Extra provides Canadian pricing and availability information about products tested for that issue. The ratings in this section are based on this month's reports, but they narrow your choices to the products that are sold in Canada.

You can use this section in either of two ways: Start with the main report, read about the products that interest you, and turn to this section to find whether they're sold–and for what price–in Canada. Or start here, find products sold in Canada whose price and Overall Score appear promising, and read more about them in the main report and full ratings chart; page numbers appear with each Canadian report. (For some products, the Canadian model designation differs slightly from the one used in the U.S.)

In most cases, the prices we list here are the approximate retail in Canadian dollars; manufacturers' list prices are indicated by an asterisk (*). The symbols shown at right identify CR Best Buys or recommended products in the U.S. ratings. "NA" in a chart means that information wasn't available from the manufacturer. We include, in the Contact Info list, the manufacturer's web address in Canada so that you can go online to get information on a model you can't find in the stores. (Many products that aren't available in Canadian stores can be bought online.)

We appreciate your support, but we don't take it for granted. Please write to **CanadaExtra@cr.consumer.org** and tell us what you think. We can't reply to every email or implement every suggestion, but with your help we'll try to keep growing to serve your needs.

CR Best Buy
Recommended models that offer the best combination of performance and price.

Recommended
Models that perform well and stand out for reasons we note.

Vacuums

Eight of the tested vacuums are available, including seven of the recommended models. **Report and ratings, pages 19-23**

Rec.	Rank	Brand & Model	Overall Score	Price
BAGLESS CANISTER VACUUM				
✓	1	**Miele** Blizzard CX1 Cat & Dog	77	$1,000
BAGGED CANISTER VACUUMS				
✓	1	**Miele** Complete C3 Marin	84	$1,250
✓	2	**Miele** Complete C3 Alize	77	$1,100
STICK VACUUMS (MORE THAN 6 LB.)				
✓	3	**Bissell** Air Ram 1984C	87	$250
✓	5	**Shark** Ion F80 Cord-Free MultiFlex IF281C	85	$480
HANDHELD VACUUMS				
$	3	**Black+Decker** DustBuster CHV1410L	78	$80
$	5	**Bissell** Pet Hair Eraser 95V5D	71	$60
	9	**Eureka** Easy Clean 71B	66	$75

MIELE COMPLETE C3 MARIN
$1,250

84 OVERALL SCORE

BISSELL AIR RAM 1984C
$250

87 OVERALL SCORE

Countertop Appliances

Fifty of the tested countertop appliances are available, including 17 of the recommended models.
Report and ratings, pages 36-47

Recommended	Rank	Brand & Model	Overall Score	Price
MULTI-COOKERS WITH PRESSURE-COOKING MODE				
✓	1	**Breville** Fast Slow Pro 6-Qt. BPR700BSS1BCA1	81	$370
✓	2	**Instant Pot** Max 6-Qt.	80	$250
✓	3	**Ninja** Foodi OP302	79	$320
	4	**Instant Pot** DUO60 7-in-1 6-Qt.	75	$130
MULTI-COOKER WITHOUT PRESSURE-COOKING MODE				
	2	**Ninja** Cooking System with Auto-iQ CS960	72	$250
TOASTER OVENS				
✓	1	**Breville** BOV650XL Oven	78	$245
✓	2	**Breville** Smart Oven Pro BOV845BSS1BCA1	74	$350
✓	3	**KitchenAid** Digital Convection Countertop KCO273SS	73	$400
✓	4	**Breville** Smart Oven BOV800XL	73	$370
✓	5	**Black+Decker** 8-Slice Digital Extra Wide TO3290XSD	72	$130
✓	6	**Breville** Smart Oven Air Convection BOV900BSS1BCA1	71	$600
	7	**DeLonghi** Livenza Stainless EO 241250M	67	$325
	8	**Cuisinart** Deluxe Convection TOB-135NC	66	$195
	10	**Hamilton Beach** 6-Slice 31411	66	$65
	11	**Hamilton Beach** Professional Digital 31240	65	$180
	13	**Cuisinart** Convection Steam CSO-300NC	62	$305
	14	**Krups** DeLuxe Convection OK710D51	60	$150
	15	**Hamilton Beach** Easy Reach 4-Slice 31334D Oven	59	$65
PROGRAMMABLE SLOW COOKERS				
✓	4	**Calphalon** Digital Sauté SCCLD1	78	$150
	5	**All-Clad** SD700450 6.5-Qt. Programmable Oval-Shaped	75	$240
	6	**Black+Decker** Digital Programmable SCD1007D-2	72	$105
	7	**Elite** Platinum MST-900D	72	$75
	8	**KitchenAid** KSC6223SS	71	$150
	9	**Hamilton Beach** Flex Cook 33861	67	$75
	10	**Cuisinart** PSC-650 Programmable	65	$120

Recommended	Rank	Brand & Model	Overall Score	Price
MANUAL SLOW COOKER				
	1	**Black+Decker** Teal Wave 7 Qt., Dial Control SC2007D	69	$60
AIR FRYERS				
✓	1	**NuWave** 6-Qt. NW-37001OB	75	$140
✓	2	**NuWave** Brio Air Fryer NW-36011	73	$135
✓	3	**Ninja** AF101C	71	$130
✓	5	**Elite** Platinum EAF-1506D 3.5-Qt. Digital	71	$210
	6	**Hamilton Beach** Digital 35050	70	$150
	7	**Power** AirFryer XL	70	$130
	8	**Kalorik** With Dual Layer Rack FT 42139 BK	70	$140
	10	**Dash** Deluxe DFAF455GBAQ01	69	$95
	11	**Cuisinart** AFR-25	68	$165
	13	**Bella** Hot Air Fryer 14538	66	$70
	14	**Chefman** Digital 2.5-Liter	64	$160
	15	**Magic Chef** XL Air Fryer with Touch Controls, MCAF56DB	63	$160
FOOD PROCESSORS				
✓	1	**Breville** Sous Chef BFP800XL/A	81	$500
✓	2	**Cuisinart** Custom 14 DFP-14BCNY	71	$370
✓	3	**Cuisinart** Prep 9 9-Cup DLC-2009CHBMC	70	$230
	4	**Oster** Pro 1200 Plus Food Processor Attachment BLSTMB-CBF-000	69	$120
	6	**Cuisinart** Prep 11 Plus DLC-2011CHBY	67	$305
	7	**Hamilton Beach** 8-Cup Stack & Snap 70820	67	$110
	10	**Breville** Sous Chef 12 BFP660 SIL	64	$400
	11	**Oster** Versa 1100 Series Performance	64	$170
	12	**KitchenAid** 11-Cup With ExactSlice KFP1133	62	$270
	13	**Cuisinart** Elemental 11 FP-11GM	62	$250
	14	**Hamilton Beach** 10-Cup With Compact Storage 70760	59	$100
	15	**Hamilton Beach** 70730C	58	$80

› All-Access and Digital members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/appliances.

BREVILLE BOV650XL
$245

78 OVERALL SCORE

KITCHENAID DIGITAL CONVECTION COUNTERTOP
$400

73 OVERALL SCORE

Streaming Media Devices

Nine of the tested streaming media devices are available. All are recommended. **Report and ratings, pages 24-35**

Recommended	Rank	Brand & Model	Overall Score	Price
HD STREAMING MEDIA DEVICES				
✓	1	**Google** Chromecast (3rd generation)	76	$45
✓	2	**Amazon** Fire TV Stick With Alexa Voice Remote	74	$50
$	4	**Roku** Express (2017)	69	$45
4K STREAMING MEDIA DEVICES				
✓	1	**Roku** Ultra (2018)	83	$165
$	3	**Amazon** Fire TV Stick 4K	81	$70
✓	4	**Google** Chromecast Ultra	80	$90
✓	5	**Apple** TV 4K (32GB)	77	$230
$	6	**Roku** Streaming Stick+	77	$70
$	8	**Roku** Premiere (2018)	72	$85

NUWAVE BRIO AIR FRYER
$135

73 OVERALL SCORE

ELITE PLATINUM 3.5-QT. DIGITAL AIR FRYER
$210

71 OVERALL SCORE

CALPHALON DIGITAL SAUTÉ SLOW COOKER
$150

78 OVERALL SCORE

Autos

All of the tested vehicles are available in Canada. **Report and ratings, pages 63-65**

		Acceleration (sec.)				Fuel Economy (liters per 100 km)		
Make & Model	**Price Range**	**0-50 km/h**	**0-100 km/h**	**80-100 km/h**	**500 Meters**	**City Driving**	**Highway Driving**	**Overall**
COMPACT SEDANS								
Toyota Corolla Hybrid	**$24,790–$26,790**	3.9	10.9	4.3	20.5	6.4	4.0	4.9
Toyota Corolla (non-Hybrid)	**$18,990–$28,490**	4.7	11.0	4.3	20.6	10.2	5.2	7.1
COMPACT SUV								
Toyota RAV4 Hybrid	**$32,090–$42,090**	3.1	8.2	3.4	18.3	7.3	5.7	6.3
LUXURY MIDSIZED SUV								
Mercedes-Benz GLE	**$64,000–$72,000**	2.4	6.3	3.1	16.6	17.7	8.1	11.7
COMPACT ELECTRIC CAR								
Hyundai Kona Electric	**$44,999–$51,999**	3.0	7.0	2.3	17.4	1.8	2.2	2.0

TOYOTA COROLLA HYBRID
PRICE AS TESTED
$24,129 (U.S.)

75
OVERALL SCORE

HYUNDAI KONA ELECTRIC
PRICE AS TESTED
$42,330 (U.S.)

78
OVERALL SCORE

MERCEDES-BENZ GLE
PRICE AS TESTED
$75,090 (U.S.)

66
OVERALL SCORE

TOYOTA RAV4 HYBRID
PRICE AS TESTED
$34,193 (U.S.)

80
OVERALL SCORE

Contact Info

How to reach manufacturers in Canada.

All-Clad
all-clad.ca/en

Bella
bellahousewares.com

Bissell
canada.bissell.com

Black+Decker
blackanddecker.ca

Breville
breville.com/ca/en/home/index.html

Calphalon
calphalon.ca

Chefman
chefman.com

Cuisinart
cuisinart.ca

Dash
bydash.com/shop

DeLonghi
delonghi.com/en-ca

Eureka
eureka.com

Hamilton Beach
hamiltonbeach.ca

Instant Pot
store.instantpot.ca

Kalorik
kalorik.com

KitchenAid
kitchenaid.ca/en_ca.html

Krups
krups.ca

Magic Chef
mcappliance.com/magic-chef

Maxi-Matic (Elite)
maxi-matic.com

Miele
miele.ca/en

Ninja
ninjakitchen.ca/en

NuWave
nuwavenow.com

Oster
oster.ca

Power
powerairfryer.com

Shark
sharkclean.com